



# CRIME THOUGHT

:Theorizing CrimethInc.

Alden Wood

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Crime Thought: Theorizing CrimethInc.  
by Alden Wood  
2012

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ISBN: 978-1-62049-004-4

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## Preliminary Notes:

The CrimethInc. Ex-Workers Collective is an American anarchist publishing collective active since the 1990s. Some of their more well-known texts include *Days of War, Nights of Love; Expect Resistance*; and *Work*. This text is a collection of essays that attempt to analyze the *theoretical* underpinnings to CrimethInc. explicitly as a project of anarchist thought. As such, this text largely ignores both CrimethInc.'s implicit historical context within the trajectory of contemporary American anarchism and their more praxis-oriented organizing work (convergences, actions, demonstrations, etc.) These essays are intentionally disparate in content; the hope is that taken together they ultimately form a critical understanding and interpretation of the thematic tendencies within CrimethInc.'s particular brand of anarchist theory.

These essays are not intended to be a full-fledged critique of CrimethInc.'s theory. Instead, their aim is to function as a way to move beyond CrimethInc.'s own theoretical autopoiesis. Due to its instant accessibility, continuous multimedia presence, and longevity – CrimethInc. has been one of the “entry-points” into contemporary North American anarchism for fledgling antiauthoritarians since the turn of the century. It is easy to fall into the simplicity of its romantic rhetoric, but to uncritically languish in it precisely as a

*complete* system of thought presupposes a naïve conception of autonomy and freedom that would do well to reevaluate its relationship to critical theory. This collection of essays will attempt to *theorize* CrimethInc. by offering readings of it that are outside of its own relative discourse, with the hope that theoretical trajectories sympathetic to the overarching project of CrimethInc. begin to emerge in the most unlikely of places.

# CrimethInc. on The Individual: The Politics of the Personal and the Radical Aesthetics of Self

Central to CrimethInc.'s main polemic of revolt against everyday life is an extremely defiant reclamation of the "political" as personal. They are quick to eschew any form of resistance, anarchist or otherwise, which abstracts the political to the point where it loses what they consider to be a fundamental connection to the individual and its desires. Coupled within their emotional schema, the drive that compels one to either work towards individual and collective liberation *or* resignation and subordination, are fundamentally informed by desire and guilt. For CrimethInc. these two emotional attributes possess serious weight in terms of their power to



influence action (or even inaction), and the gravity with which CrimethInc. deals with these expansive emotional states is central to understanding how they attempt to navigate a new dialectics of experience. In the creation of this dialectics is a hypercritical polemic which attacks conventional political discourse (and action) for being too removed from the realm of individual experience – essentially specialized and inaccessible to most individuals. Much of this polemic targets what may be called “liberal activism” in that it often separates individual desire from the political, and as such it paradoxically requires a rather privileged distance of removal from experience to fully immerse oneself in such political activity.

CrimethInc. argues that capitalism largely goes unchallenged, at least at the level where significant systemic change occurs, in that so much of the “resistance” to it merely recuperates the very socio-political structures which it ostensibly sets out to reform or even destroy. They argue that within the North American anti-capitalist milieu, much political “work” is something existentially separated from an authentic understanding of one’s own experience of living within a capitalist society. Emotionally, this lack of self-referential awareness often manifests itself as guilt; and as the inverse to liberated individual desire, it is specifically this type of socio-political guilt which retroactively creates the impetus for many individuals to engage with “the political.”

In an essay in *Days of War, Nights of Love* entitled “Face it, your politics are boring as fuck” attribut-

ed to “Nadia C.”, CrimethInc. sets out to explicitly challenge the ways in which guilt factors into a fraudulent engagement with the political and attempts to reclaim “politics” as something intrinsically tied to individual experience. Nadia C. harangues the reader in an accusatory manner: “For how many of you is politics a *responsibility*? Something you engage in because you feel you *should*, when in your heart of hearts there are a million things you would rather be doing?” (*Days of War* 189). This is a fairly typical critique leveled by post-left anarchists at conventional leftist praxis, and implicit in this turn away from political activism is a strong call to fully emancipate individual desires, and in doing so, to enable the possibility for societal transformation. It is a radical egoism, one that acknowledges that the most obvious ontological space which can be influenced or transformed is the direct experience of the individual. Thus, for the CrimethInc. adept it becomes necessary to existentially confront one’s own inherent power to experience and define the act of living according to their own terms. It is a fostering and strengthening of the *spaces of being* (creation of new ontologies) that already lay outside the grasp of external systems of authority; the attempt to reclaim the *spaces of being* which were once subject to the control of the individual.

In their attempt to reappropriate the individual’s *spaces of being* CrimethInc. constructs an experiential paradigm for authentic existence that finds its articulation as *dangerous living*, to borrow a portion of the

subtitle of their quarterly journal *Rolling Thunder: An anarchist journal of dangerous living*. It is through this notion of *dangerous living* that CrimethInc. introduces an element of creativity in redefining one's experience of life. Through these inspired acts of trying to reclaim the authentic self, one embarks upon the ultimate insurrection (the revolt against life itself as a construct), in favor of living as liberated experience and subjectivity. Nadia C. goes on to berate the unimaginative within the ranks of the "resistance" to the totality of social and economic coercion (ostensibly anyone situated on the traditional left, from social-democrats to anarcho-communists): "You actually do us all a real disservice with your tiresome, tedious politics. For in fact there is nothing more important than politics. NOT the politics of American 'democracy' and law [...] Not the politics of any leader or ideology that demands that you make sacrifices for 'the cause.' But the politics of our everyday lives" (*Days of War* 190). This antagonistic assertion is one that attempts to connect with those who ostensibly are already experiencing pluralized systemic subjugation under late-capitalism, and radically claims that authentic resistance is not found in some abstracted rhetoric or specialized vanguard; instead, it is a call to creatively assert an individual existence predicated upon this notion of *dangerous living*. It is against the ritualization of protest in favor of spontaneous revolt, which is dialectical in nature as it grows and changes its shape, tenor, and expression through the inevitability of conflict.

Creatively asserting one's individual desires becomes both the means and the end to CrimethInc.'s articulation of *dangerous living*. Such a radical departure from what conventionally constitutes "the political" requires elucidation:

"What should be political? Whether we enjoy what we do to get food and shelter. Whether we feel like our daily interactions with our friends, neighbors, and coworkers are fulfilling. Whether we have the opportunity to live each day the way we desire to. And "politics" should consist not of merely discussing these questions, but of acting directly to improve our lives in the immediate present. Acting in a way that is itself entertaining, exciting, joyous – because political action that is tedious, tiresome, and oppressive can only perpetuate tedium, fatigue, and oppression in our own lives. [...] For we ourselves, happiness in our own lives and the lives of our fellows, must be our cause!" (*Days of War* 191).

This is a stripping bare of conventional political rhetoric, to the level of simple desire. It is at once naïve yet poignant in its urgency. An almost fanatical insistence for un-ideological praxis occupies this proclamation, and by this, CrimethInc. attempts to resonate with the aspect of human experience that is at the most basic socio-cultural level of shared commonalities – the desire for happiness. This desire is translated into an application that calls for

# CrimethInc. on The Individual: The Politics of the Personal and the Radical Aesthetics of Self

Central to CrimethInc.'s main polemic of revolt against everyday life is an extremely defiant reclamation of the "political" as personal. They are quick to eschew any form of resistance, anarchist or otherwise, which abstracts the political to the point where it loses what they consider to be a fundamental connection to the individual and its desires. Coupled within their emotional schema, the drive that compels one to either work towards individual and collective liberation *or* resignation and subordination, are fundamentally informed by desire and guilt. For CrimethInc. these two emotional attributes possess serious weight in terms of their power to

that while indeed the discursive tools available to express individual experience are held communally, “this is not to say that nothing is original; rather *everything* is original, for every expression, every action, however frequently repeated, issues from a unique point in the web of human relations” (*Days of War* 183). A totalizing claim like this only makes sense within the context of radical individualism, as it paradoxically is a communal solipsism. Such a radical ontology authoritatively locates power solely within the individual and, expanding upon this, places the weight of its emphasis on the role of experience in, quite literally, the creation of self. CrimethInc. expounds further on this thought:

“But at the same time, this means that the recontextualization of pre-existing elements (which some call ‘plagiarism’) is essential to all communication. And if every expression is both borrowed and unique, it seems absurd to try to separate expressions into one category or other. [...] the line between imitation and innovation is so blurry that any distinctions are bound to be arbitrary” (*Days of War* 183).

Thus, using language and other forms of expression (visual and aural), CrimethInc. establishes a commonality which irrevocably binds the plurality of individual experiences with something larger – the experience of the communal. In asserting that “everything is original” it conversely necessitates the acknowledgement that existence itself is reappropriated social bricolage. This

is testament to an interdependent causality, where emotions, actions, expressions, and existence itself are subject to a totalizing externality. It is at precisely this point, in trying to reconcile the communal tools for articulating experience with the singularity of individual existence, that CrimethInc. seems to stop the development of their argument as they opt to merely use the notion of social bricolage as a means to question authorship and intellectual property.

Seen within the context of articulating one's existence as an essentially subversive and creative act, claiming that "everything is original" lends itself to a certain convenience in attempting to position the individual as the superlative focus of revolt, insurrection, and liberation. It is essentially a self-affirming position, in that it contextualizes the individual in the role of the artist, whose medium is the experience of life. One is simultaneously creating a life of unparalleled originality while accessing the entirety of human existence as a means of inspiration. This revolutionary "artist" is a being capable of experiencing the most rote and mundane experiences as uniquely their own, while finding strength in the notion that their existential experience will always be dependent on the experiences of others. It is the synthesis that emerges from a dialectics of being, which attempts to metaphysically blur the distinctions between self and other, and thus arrive at a wholly new ontology – one that is neither self nor other, but a totalizing liminality which resolutely

defends itself against both stasis and quantification.

CrimethInc. goes on to critique the attempts that lay claim to the “creation” of intellectual work and art, yet this critique can just as easily apply to the existential restructuring implicit in this argument:

“What signature could truly capture the complete origins of a work, anyway, considering all the disparate and ancient components that make up any given work of art, and all the human relations and innovations that were necessary to arrive at them? For that matter, if the notion of the fixed, distinct identity of individuals is also a superstition, that renders even the *possibility* of an individual signature preposterous! If one wanted to be honest, one would sign the name of one’s entire civilization to one’s poetry or pottery, and add to that the seal of the cosmos from which it arose – effectively communalizing the work” (*Days of War* 184-185).

Here CrimethInc.’s logic of a totalizing communality seems to negate their position on the primacy of individual desire, for because they contend that “the notion of the fixed, distinct identity of individuals is also a superstition” they seem to circle back around to a solipsism based in constant flux. While they do appear to effectively argue against a static conception of identity, their argument constructs a self that, while it cannot be reduced to mere stasis, seems



almost impossible to authoritatively locate in an ontological sense. Their conception of self becomes so enmeshed with the ever-changing identity of the collective that the very “individual” essence that so much of their writing purports to defend becomes impossible to delineate in any coherent fashion. This incomplete articulation of the reconciliation between the individual and the collective is something that is prevalent in many of the conclusions on specialized topics which CrimethInc. addresses. Yet instead of this being a rhetorical flaw in their overall argument, this points to a genuine inability to *fully* elucidate the complexities of this classic dichotomy and as such, it is an earnest attempt to work towards an approximation of reconciliation through the very process itself.

Process becomes central to CrimethInc.’s position on fully liberating one’s desires, and as such the very act of living becomes the only authentic act of creation, as any attempt to qualify any other creative act is a static and specialized product which becomes mere symbolism – and as such “false creation” is removed from the experiential-based reality of existence. In “Product is the Excrement of Action,” an essay attributed to British novelist Jeanette Winterson (it is unclear to what extent she contributed to the creation of *Days of War, Nights of Love* if at all – or, in true CrimethInc. form, they merely appropriated and plagiarized her essay for their own political purposes), aesthetic product is negatively presented as a distraction and

indication of over-intellectualizing the simple sanctity of process and action. The essay draws attention to the ways in which capitalist hegemony not only structures the nature of existence on socio-economic fronts, but also pervades the psycho-emotional realm as well – as it affects the way in which one relates to experience, and justifies certain behavior and ritual engagement as a means toward some future state.

CrimethInc. interjects their position halfway through Winterson's appropriated/contributed essay as they assert that "modern society is centered around the production and distribution of material goods, rather than the happiness and satisfaction of its participants. Thus modern man thinks in terms of what he has 'to show for it,' rather than considering the life itself" (*Days of War* 196). This is a classic Marxist analysis of the root of alienation within the working-class, yet CrimethInc. rather simply proposes an alternative to the current ways in which the individual relates to their own existence. They again claim that this alternative is to merely liberate individual desire, or as they word it here "happiness and satisfaction."

Achieving the liberation of individual desire CrimethInc. argues, through the inclusion of Winterson's prose, is done by reclaiming the individual spaces which one metaphysically occupies, and fully expanding one's nature of being into the present moment alone. It is an attack on the way in which capitalism socializes people into conflating experience with consumption, and self-

worth with productivity. Winterson writes, “‘The ends justifies the means,’ we say; that is, the *products* of our actions, the end results of our lives, are more important to us than the process of living itself” (*Days of War* 195). CrimethInc., again through Winterson, is essentially arguing for a psychological and temporal rupture in which the individual can freely and fully exist in their plural totality within the present, and evade the coercive logic of capitalism that places emphasis on the creation, sale, and consumption of *products* (commodities). This commodification influences the way in which life itself becomes something that only possesses worth in both its metaphorical and physical (i.e. labor) exchange value – or what, of a quantifiably comparable worth, can be received in exchange for one’s lived existence. It is a common critique of a plethora of religious and philosophical traditions, that they furtively attempt to control the future and encourage detachment from the present. CrimethInc. extends this critique to two social roles often thought to be at the forefront of creating alternative existences – the artist and the revolutionary.

CrimethInc. contentiously asserts “the worst of us, in fact, are the radicals and artists. All too often, we ‘revolutionaries’ expend our efforts thinking and talking about a revolution ‘that is to come,’ rather than concentrating on making revolution in the present tense” (*Days of War* 197). Here the artist and the revolutionary are presented as being fundamentally removed from their existence here and now, as they instead focus with

an almost zealous fervor on the production of things or events in the future. Most political ideologies that would fall under the reductive signifier *revolutionary* – be they anarcho-syndicalism, council communism, or traditional Maoism – all operate with a dedication to what is essentially a *product* of the correct social, cultural, and political contexts and conditions: revolution, or the complete transformation of present society into their particular ideology's alternative. Thus CrimethInc.'s argument for a more complete experience of the present as *pure being* is paradoxically, ideologically *anti-ideology*. This insistence that the blind faith of the revolutionary to a "cause" or "movement" is just as self-alienating as an adherence to organized religious dogma (which CrimethInc.'s polemic also attacks), clearly situates their critique within the post-left anarchist tradition.

For CrimethInc. the artist is a specialized role like any other, and as such they attack the hypocrisy of its existence as a clearly delineated social position and cultural occupation. It is a role that attempts to control (albeit in a very different way than a capitalist owner) and validate the creativity of lived experience as a cultural commodity: art. The distinction here must be made between what CrimethInc. fundamentally argues is the purest creative process, that of the uniquely singular lived experience of the individual and the *product* of isolating, defining, qualifying, and commodifying said experience into *art*. These two related aspects of existence are ostensibly in conflict with one another.

The experiential process of creative living (*dangerous living*) is essentially alive and evolving in constant flux, whereas the codification of this experience into aesthetic forms is essentially static, greatly reduced in the complexity of inference and meaning, and quite simply, dead. This relates again to socialization within the logic of production and consumption, as CrimethInc. argues: “we’re so used to thinking in terms of production that even when we try to make life into something immediate and exciting, we still end up centering our efforts around an event in the future” (*Days of War* 197). It is essentially the logic of submission. It is the acquiescence to the commodification of *everything* within the realm of experience, subsequently turning said experience into *something*.

Whereas CrimethInc. critiques academia for attempting to establish its authority as the specialists of interpreting and codifying experience, they critique the artist for specializing in the fabrication of existence and conflating such stasis with the *actuality* of living. This need to produce something obviously extrinsic to the totality of existence and symbolically pass it off as sanctified representation exemplifies how the artist’s “vocation itself depends on making products out of the raw material of real-life experience” (*Days of War* 197). CrimethInc. argues that this need to synthesize individual experience into what is essentially the schema of production and commodification, exemplifies the way in which “there is something of the capitalist’s

lust for domination in the way that artists mold their emotions and experiences into forms of their own making through the act of expression; for the expression of feelings and sensations, unique and unfathomable as they are, always consists of a kind of simplification" (*Days of War* 197). It is precisely this point that forms the strongest part of CrimethInc.'s argument here, in that this "simplification" or reduction of experience to mere product steals power away from the moment of experience which inspired the creation of the art which now represents it – and in so doing, the artist can, theoretically at least, representatively reproduce the entirety of their individual experience until all that exists is a mirrored simulacra of what once was.

In this way art becomes the most significant example of how "the present has lost almost all significance for modern man" (*Days of War* 196). While CrimethInc. argues that most people socialized within the logic of capitalist relations experience this profound disconnect with the immediacy and completeness of their experience, artists essentially are more mired in their own inability to confront such submission and they attempt to commodify this lack instead of genuinely attacking it. CrimethInc. elaborates on this deeper folly on the part of the artist:

"It isn't enough for the artist to just experience and appreciate life as it really is; she comes to cannibalize her life for what is really a *career*, a series of products outside herself, even

adjusting her life for her career's sake. Worse, she may find that she cannot make love on a rooftop at day break without planning out the *excellent scene for her novel* (excrement!) this will make for" (*Days of War* 197).

This passage is important in further elucidating a semblance of what, rather reticently, can be called CrimethInc.'s own epistemology. In addition to further developing their theme of anti-art/pro-creative (*dangerous*) living, CrimethInc. implicitly articulates a critique of specialization and a perspective on self-passivity. Specialization, no longer confined to the classical Marxist notions of labor in the industrial sense, expands into all modes of human epistemologies. The argument CrimethInc. posits against specialization is one which provides a fundamental rhetorical framework which they in turn level at every socio-cultural *occupation*, from artists to academics and politicians to priests.

At the core of their rhetoric is an earnest attempt to elucidate the ways in which specialization corrupts on two fronts. The first is perhaps the most obvious, in that when individuals and/or communities relinquish a certain amount of authority to individuals other than themselves they are essentially ceding their own autonomy of experience. This is often tied to a certain *progressivism* that is prevalent in the establishment and maintenance of these positions of authority and specialization, in the sense that the authority of knowledge or custom is often

thought of as purely linear and dependent on the authority of knowledge or custom *from an earlier time* (this also forms the basis for CrimethInc.'s critique of history, which will be addressed later).

This progressive linearity of dependence provides certain epistemological spaces to be authoritatively *controlled*. For example, the specialists of capitalist control, namely the financiers – the individuals possessing sufficient capital to accrue just by its own mass, the bourgeois class in classical Marxist thought – only possess authority and control in the sense that custom and knowledge of capitalist social-control has become so pervasive on an ontological level that the majority who do not benefit from, and are often exploited by, its systemic structures defer to the specialization of a small elite that maintains the linear myth that capitalism is the only option for socio-economic and socio-cultural systematizing. This critique of specialization is almost universally held by most theoretical strains of anarchism, and it points to the way in which individuals are extrinsically corrupted and coerced by this deferral to authority and specialization.

The second way that CrimethInc. argues that specialization corrupts occurs at the intrinsic level. By consistently deferring to the authority and specialization of others, self-doubt manifests itself as a type of malaise and even ennui in terms of reconciling said authority/specialization with one's own lived experience. With the further encroachment of humanity into the



realms of a technological hyper-reality, CrimethInc. argues that the individual is becoming more critical, and even doubting the veracity, of the singularity of lived experience. CrimethInc. subtly claims that this is one of the reasons that most societies still cling to some semblance of organized religion. As Jean-Paul Sartre and the French existentialists first articulated, the individual “is condemned to be free” (Sartre 529); and this daunting task to define and construct one’s experience of being often proves to be too daunting a task for the individual. Instead, they resign themselves to the systems and authority of convention and, as most anarchists would argue further, exploitation. Thus for CrimethInc. specialization oppresses in two fundamental ways: first, it extrinsically creates the necessary structures and authority that grant legitimacy to externalized exploitation; and secondly, it intrinsically creates the conditions of distrust in the lived experience of the individual and may cause the individual to defer to the specialization of authority, and in so doing resign themselves to a life consistently unsure of its own agency.

The way in which this disconnect points to how the individual as subject no longer grants their own personal experience legitimacy, conducted en masse, is reminiscent of the French Situationist Guy Debord’s notion of the *spectacle*. In his seminal 1967 Situationist work, *Society of the Spectacle*, Debord writes that “understood in its totality, the spectacle is both the result and the goal of the dominant mode of production.

It is not a mere decoration added to the real world. It is the very heart of this real society's unreality" (Debord 8). Thus the *spectacle* is the logical result of the totality of commodification; the most extreme result when lived experience itself is something to be passively consumed by the very individual living it. The distinction between inauthentic and authentic reality not only becomes impossible to delineate, they merge into one another – thus, the real becomes the unreal. CrimethInc. argues this point less explicitly than Debord does, yet they adopt this line of reasoning as a part of their polemic.

For CrimethInc. the passivity which one views their lived experience with (through the perspective of a detached observer rather than the active creator), is indicative of the unreal, the inauthentic; and as such their program is essentially an attempt to reclaim active authorship. CrimethInc. claims, "We must put life and experience first, we must meet the world with only this in mind, as fresh and innocent as when we were children, with no intentions to cannibalize, categorize, organize, or simplify the profound infinities of our experiences" (*Days of War* 198). Implicit in their language is a redemptive aspect to their call, which in one sense distances CrimethInc.'s analysis from Debord's.

Much of the plight surrounding the contemporary human condition in "Western" societies revolves around the creation of the self *as commodity*, an identity with static accomplishments that can be presented in full, and exchanged accordingly. Debord

frames this commodification of the self as contributing to the inauthentic nature of society, yet precisely because this inauthenticity, this *spectacle*, is so pervasive it fully becomes an authentic existence. This conflation of the real and the unreal, testifies to the way in which “the spectacle presents itself as a vast inaccessible reality that can never be questioned. Its sole message is: ‘What appears is good; what is good appears.’ The passive acceptance it demands is already effectively imposed by its monopoly of appearances” (Debord 10). Thus for Debord and CrimethInc., appearance becomes, in the tautological sense, totalizing. Experience and appearance become one in the same, and just as appearance can be crafted and coerced into an inauthentic “real,” so too then can experience be constructed in the same way.

Whereas Debord and the Situationists embark at this point on a more protracted and profound analysis of the ways in which this construction occurs, CrimethInc. is content to stop at what becomes a moralizing call to regain authentic self-authorship. CrimethInc. goes on to claim that if one does not embark upon this authentic reclamation of the self, then “we will miss what is most vital, most beautiful, most immediate in this world, in our search for things that can be pressed flat and preserved ‘for all time’” (*Days of War* 198). Thus CrimethInc. eschews the deep theoretical engagement and analysis of the *spectacle* that Debord and other Situationists devote much writing to, in favor of an immediate experiential-based

reappropriation of the authentic self. This impulsivity is characteristic of much of their work, as they concede that rhetorical philosophizing (which of course they paradoxically engage in) is ultimately a part of the larger problem of distancing and the removal from immediate experience. Through Jeanette Winterson's prose, CrimethInc. concludes their treatise on the duplicitous nature of art (1. authentic: art as life itself 2. inauthentic: art as static commodity) by arguing that:

*"Imagination should be used first and foremost to transform everyday reality, not just to make symbolic representations of it. How many exciting novels could be written about the sort of lives that most of us lead these days, anyway? Let us make living our art, rather than seeking to make mere art out of our lives. Let's stop 'making history' – we're all so obsessed with 'making a mark' – and start living. That would be a real revolution!" (Days of War 198).*

It becomes clear that through their dissemination of the production of culture, and their defiant call to reclaim the subsequent power that creation entails, that CrimethInc. crafts an approach to aesthetics that builds upon Situationist thought, and to a certain extent exemplifies the radical critiques of aesthetics done before them by the Frankfurt School of Marxist critical theory.

Most specifically, CrimethInc.'s radical aesthetics is perhaps best understood by contextualizing it through the work of critical theorist Theodor Adorno. When Cri-

methInc. distances their aesthetic position from the notion that a “revolutionary” aesthetics can and should exist, such as the overtly political works of Bertolt Brecht or even Jean-Luc Godard, they instead move towards a position which is more Adornian in its negative intent.

Adorno’s thinking on “negative dialectics” and aesthetics is instrumental in interpreting Crime-thInc.’s rejection of the role of artist – revolutionary or otherwise. For Adorno, “no message should be posited onto a work of art; rather, art should be allowed through form to re-present the sedimented stuff of society in unintentional ways [...] the notion of a message in art, even when politically radical, already contains an accommodation to the world” (Elliot 5). At this level, CrimethInc.’s aesthetic functions in the sense that it is exchanging the need to articulate a message, for a life that is inherently underscored by an individualized creative force, which is both undefined and unmitigated. As they assert: “Burn your maps and set out: you will find yourself in a world as yet unmapped. Refuse destinations, as definitions – we are *making*, now come and become” (*Expect Resistance* 316).

In Adornian thought negative dialectics is “an anti-system in reaction to the prevalent norms and values of society; for these norms and values serve to legitimize a society that does not correspond to them. Concepts as ordinarily used to mask the truth – they have become lies” (Elliot 3). This seemingly paradoxical reworking of classical dialectics (both Hegelian and

Marxist) attempts to elucidate the ways in which even the opposition within a given dialectical relationship is in and of itself merely the negated part of a totalizing concept – not independent of itself, nor truly a negation at all. Thus Adornian negative dialectics “is the critical analysis of society and aimed for the negation of the negation” (Elliot 3). This concept can perhaps be best contextualized within the Frankfurt School’s break from classical Marxist thought; a rupture predicated upon the Frankfurt School’s heretical notion of the weakened role of the working-class in revolutionary struggle.

The Frankfurt School no longer ascribed revolutionary impetus to the proletariat as a singular, coherent subject. Instead they claimed that the working class was no longer an oppositional force within the construct of the proletariat-bourgeoisie dialectical relationship. They claimed that the working-class now functions as the legitimization of opposition which has already been recuperated through micropolitical means into the controlling discourse of capitalist totality. Thus, the Frankfurt School negated the conventional working-class subject in favor of a new ontological subject, entirely without prescriptive pretense – the individual subject.

CrimethInc. articulates the same move away from concretizing prescriptions in terms of the construction of identity and alterity. Instead, CrimethInc. is more in favor of merely negating the “prevalent norms and values of society” (Elliot 3) and having that be the first part of an undefined process

of continuous self-creation situated squarely with the context of the infinite temporal present. Seen in this way, CrimethInc.'s aesthetics is ultimately an aesthetics of self which is Adornian in the sense that it eschews the notion of contaminating the medium with an explicit message. CrimethInc. claims they long for "a building without a blueprint, a party without a platform, an experiment without a hypothesis, a mission without end, a quest without objective, a desire without object" (*Expect Resistance* 317). The act of desiring without an object is conflated with the act of creating art in terms of its sensuous implications.

Yet CrimethInc.'s aesthetics is actually both a negative and positive project. It is a negative project in the sense that without actually defining its desire, it attempts to causally destroy the subject/object linkage. Conversely, through constructing this objectless desire it is a positive project in the sense that the desire in question is not of the past (dead) nor of the future (prescriptive), but rather continuously in a *state of becoming* in the infinite present. According to Adornian thought, "our very subjectivity is being 'liquidated,' threatened by the sheer power of reification and identity thinking" (Elliot 3). This semantic split between "reification" (prescriptive-future oriented) and "identity thinking" (reductive, past oriented) points to the way in which subjectivity, within the totalizing pressure of late-capitalism, is being forced to function either along lines which adhere to previously formed identity constructs or to prescriptive

objectives or goals, which in and of themselves are merely pre-reified concessions to systems of control.

Thus for CrimethInc., and to a certain extent Adorno, the move towards liberating the subject from the object “isn’t a new attempt to program everything and everyone, or a new formula that will finally force all the organic complexity of living into the mold of some theoretical ideal. This is a way of doing things, not a new standard to march under, not another system – it’s an approach to life, to solving the problems we have right now and then solving the next ones” (*Expect Resistance* 317). Therefore, CrimethInc.’s radical conception of aesthetics, their vehemence in claiming that the only act of creation should be that of lived experience, elucidates the way in which CrimethInc. is first and foremost concerned with making the political personal – the creation of a subversive and liberating “approach to life.”



# CrimethInc. on the Collective: The Role of “The Crowd” as Revolutionary Subject

Central to both CrimethInc.'s analysis of socio-cultural hegemonic structuring and their prescriptive case for resistance to such coercion is a calculated explication of collective dynamics. In order to gain a more complete understanding of CrimethInc.'s fervent adherence to the importance of the individual and subjectivity within a context of socio-political resistance, it becomes essential to analyze their treatment of the collective. The relationship between the liberated individual and the liberated collective, is perhaps most evident in their work on crowd theory. Although their appropriation of the institutionalized sociological conception of crowd theory is essentially reductive

at best, their critique of this model allows for an earnest exploration of a more plural reading of crowds – which attempts to reconcile individual desire with group cohesion. In an essay from *Expect Resistance* entitled “Crowd Dynamics and the Mass Psychology of Possibility,” CrimethInc. first, and perhaps most dangerously, totalizes conventional crowd theory as an academic study which is ostensibly unable to be self-reflective enough to understand its position as a component of control that reinforces the status quo. CrimethInc. claims that this academic approach is steeped in hypocrisy. Regarding sociological specialists they claim:

“But in fact, they [sociologists] too are submerged in a crowd: it is simply a bigger one, so much bigger that it is unrecognizable as one so long as the observer remains within it. The crowds they purport to explain are dissident microcosms of the same form; they can be identified as crowds only because they are distinct in some way from the colossal crowd that is the theorists’ society” (*Expect Resistance* 109).

This rhetorical attack that CrimethInc. levels at conventional crowd theorists is existentialist in nature, as they claim such “specialized” theorists are fundamentally unaware of their own existence as a crowd or group reifying and recuperating distinctive hegemonic social relationships. According to CrimethInc. such theorists are “simply apologists for their patrons’ crowd control” (*Expect Resistance* 109). Thus, the first delineation

tion of difference which CrimethInc. makes in regards to crowd classification is one based on power and control. It is a dichotomy that can be essentialized down to *a group which acts* and *a group which is acted upon*.

While this is a reductive binary that is seemingly free from moralizing qualifications, it is a relationship in which value is determined by the efficacy of the action in question and its relationship to the longevity of power and control. In this way crowds which, given their unique socio-political contexts, possess a modicum of authority or control over other “crowds” can both act or be acted upon. What is important to explore here is the result of such actions and their relationship to the reification or dismantling of the dominant position of a given crowd.

CrimethInc. takes this analysis and applies a moralizing framework to it, as the example they provide for the essential conflict of control between their two general crowd classifications points to the intricate role of perception and representation. CrimethInc. argues here that the right to representation of a crowd, is inextricably tied to the possession of control. The initial example of crowd opposition they posit is that of “the mob that riots and loots a shopping district,” juxtaposed to the crowd that “built the shopping district, that owns the shops and organizes advertising campaigns to promote their wares, that takes it for granted that that space is best utilized for buying and selling” (*Expect Resistance* 110). Thus CrimethInc.’s crowd theory is one which existence is defined through opposition.

Representation within a given crowd's context becomes tantamount to the relationship to other social crowds, and CrimethInc. implicitly asserts that language is often indicative of such a means to control and recuperate the status-quo. In their example of dominating crowds and subjugated crowds, CrimethInc. argues that the power of representation *always* rests with the dominant crowd and it is only from a perspective external to in-group crowd hegemony that "the fact that this dominant crowd is also a mob, only a more entrenched and institutionalized one" (*Expect Resistance* 110) can be articulated.

In this way, "crowd reality" becomes a social construct *a posteriori* to representation for CrimethInc. They argue that "reality itself is determined by consensus – that is to say, by crowds [...] The world we inhabit is not made up merely of physical or sensory facts; these raw materials gain meaning as signs, tools, customs, and so on from their social context, and the resulting forest of signs is the greater part of what we mean when we say reality" (*Expect Resistance* 110). Following this logic requires that which is epistemologically signified be subject to power and influence as it is ultimately mere representation. Thus reality itself is social representation, and as such the ways in which it is created, articulated, and defended can be controlled. It is in this sense that CrimethInc. justifies their claim that something as seemingly egoist and free from coercion as individual desire can be the representation of a constructed reality by the dominant crowd.

Yet, lest this argument reduce individual agency to mere victimization by some abstracted “dominant” crowd, CrimethInc. is careful to reiterate that while an individual’s desire may indeed be subject to a constructed reality, that “it is these social conditions that create individuals, including the values that influence their choices; but, as these conditions are themselves the result of individual decisions, they only persist because people choose to reproduce them” (*Expect Resistance* 110). This line of reasoning clearly implicates the individual’s role in creating and participating in the very representation of reality which effectively situates them in the “dominated” crowd. While this implication of the individual as both dominator and dominated may initially seem pessimistic in tone, it actually forms the basis for CrimethInc.’s prescription for the redemption of individual and, by extension, crowd desire and reality. Because the individual is so implicated in the reification of the very systems of oppression which define and represent their experiential reality, they possess the latent power to reclaim the right to define their own unique existence. Thus, as stated before, CrimethInc.’s questioning and analysis of crowd dynamics is essentially existentialist in nature.

CrimethInc.’s crowd theory presents the crowd as a totalizing social category. They posit that the essentialism of the crowd as being defined in relation to the individual is purely an arbitrary definition through inversion. While of course on the physical plane

an individual can inhabit a “non-crowd” existence, ontologically speaking CrimethInc. argues that the systemic layers of social convention and conditioning, all take place within various spheres of “the crowd.” Central to this conception is their analysis of the way that alienation and isolation factor into crowd theory. Agency (and conversely its lack) within a given crowd is determined by CrimethInc. as how alienated or isolated a crowd (and subsequently the individuals who comprise it) is from two essentialist attributes: existence and power. In their analysis of the self-reflexivity and agency of such social groupings, they arrive at four generalized subdivisions of “the crowd.”

The first and “most primitive kind” of crowd CrimethInc. identifies is the “crowd that lacks awareness of its own existence” (*Expect Resistance* 111). Of all their group distinctions, this crowd is perhaps the most alienated from its being, in that it moves beyond itself in its inability to understand the dynamics which constitute it, to the more alienated position of actually adhering to fallacies that it internalizes about its own autonomy. This is the crowd, in “Western” societies at least, that believes its desires are inherently free from any external coercion. It is a crowd that believes that because it consumes to satiation, the desires which necessitated such action are entirely their own. It refuses to acknowledge the calculated manipulation and commodification of the veracity of their unique desires, in favor of a homogenizing tameness. CrimethInc. goes on to assert

that “crowds of this type are characterized by an inability to question their own assumptions and a total denial of responsibility for their actions” (*Expect Resistance* 111).

The second kind of crowd in CrimethInc.’s hierarchy of self-reflexivity is “a crowd that is aware of its existence, but not its power” (*Expect Resistance* 111). This type of crowd is perhaps less alienated than the first, but is still impotent when it comes to actualizing its own collective agency. Thus, here too, as with the first type of crowd, desire is externalized – it is something outside the purview of the individuals making up “the crowd.” This type of crowd rationalizes and deceives itself into thinking that something other than the desires of the individuals which comprise the grouping have created the conditions for the crowd to coalesce.

An example in *Expect Resistance*, for this type of crowd is the masses of people at sporting and entertainment events. They display an inability to reconcile desire with agency, as CrimethInc. asserts “the members of such crowds [*second type of crowd*] do not think of themselves as the authors of the situations they create. It is their money, their attendance, their interest alone that make these possible, but they attribute this power to others outside themselves – the organizers, the promoters, the Rolling Stones or Atlanta Braves” (*Expect Resistance* 111). Paradoxically, the deferral of the individual to the authority and conduct of “the crowd” reflects the logical disconnect that these individual actors have from understanding that

it is quite literally, they themselves which constitute the make-up of such a crowd – and as such, they are active controllers of its power, instead of passive participants in something greater than themselves.

For the most part, this second type of crowd ostensibly recuperates and replicates the very social conventions that govern the hierarchization of “the crowd” at the macro-social level of political existence. This is a very anarchistic conception; that of finding representation at the micro-social level, of the ways in which deference to authority finds its most basic socio-cultural structuring. It can be argued that much like how fans at a large sporting event are so alienated from their own power to influence the ontological direction of “the crowd,” through a systematic socialization of commodified and externally-projected desire, that they see themselves as mere spectators in a life which they fail to acknowledge responsibility in creating – so too do upstanding citizens see themselves removed from the discourse of political governance, and as such they relinquish any modicum of self-authority and authentic desire in favor of passively being acted upon by the totality of the *spectacle*.

CrimethInc.’s crowd theory becomes more complex with the introduction of a third type of crowd: “the crowd that is aware of its own power to determine reality” (*Expect Resistance* 112). This is an essential break from the passivity of the first two types of crowds, in that agency is understood as inherently being a part



of this crowd's dynamic. CrimethInc.'s example of this third type of crowd is stereotypical football (soccer) hooliganism. They make the argument that such riotous behavior is actually a defiant reclamation of the crowd as author of its own experience. They go on to assert that such behavior is "actually more cultured, more civilized, than mere spectatorship: these are people initiating their own activities, not just following instructions like automatons" (*Expect Resistance* 112). This qualitative judgment is based in part on the manifestation of desire within a group context, and while CrimethInc. frames this third type of crowd "as protagonist, as subject rather than object" (*Expect Resistance* 112), they are nonetheless careful to not romanticize the authority of a crowd, no matter how self-reflective it is. They are quick to assert that the lynch mobs of the segregated American South were indicative of this type of crowd that was aware of its own power, and thus CrimethInc. implicitly points to a tacit distinction between an anarchist perspective and an authoritarian-socialist perspective in their theoretical treatment of "the crowd." While this conjecture may perhaps be an unqualified statement, classical Marxists frequently point the "power to determine reality" (*Expect Resistance* 112) in mass crowds. Additionally, classical Marxists often delineate such crowds solely on the reductive categorization of class-station alone.

If we apply CrimethInc.'s sociological hierarchy of crowd dynamics to classical Marxism, one could argue that this third type of crowd is the ultimate level of self-

reflexivity for the classical Marxist notion of “the crowd,” in the sense that such a crowd of the working-class could coalesce into a “mass movement” (so reified in the classical Marxist tradition) – and as such, overturn the oppressive socio-economic dictates of capital. Yet what the classical Marxist tradition refuses to acknowledge in its own theoretical position on crowds is that, to invert a trite adage, the sum is not greater than its parts. It is here that the distinction between libertarian-socialist and authoritarian-socialist crowd theory becomes most evident, as a crowd aware of its own power is not enough for most anarchists. CrimethInc. argues:

“A crowd that has a sense of its own power is not necessarily liberating for those who form it. As a crowd, they may be free from the domination of other crowds [classical Marxist notion of revolution, the working-class pitted against the capitalist-class], but this is no guarantee that any of them are free within the crowd. Individuals who know they are powerful together aren’t always aware of the part each plays in creating that power, nor do they necessarily know how to join in deciding how it is applied” (*Expect Resistance* 112).

It is here, that CrimethInc. explores the ways in which even crowds that are aware of *both* their *existence* and *power* can still sublate and repress the desire of the very individuals that comprise such crowds.

CrimethInc. goes on to caution that “crowds

are vulnerable to authority, to being controlled by minorities or outsiders, to the extent that each participant is unaware of how to employ his agency in the group" (*Expect Resistance* 112). Here again is the distinction between state-socialists and anarchists, as the anarchist critique of the defenses made by traditional Marxists of organizational models like vanguards or party-politics, are essentially that such concessions of authority to "representative" powers merely recuperate the ways in which individuals cede their authority-of-self to others and how such cessions lead to systemic abuses of power and privilege – in ways often contextualized *outside* of economic exploitation.

CrimethInc.'s fourth and final type of crowd is "the crowd made up of individuals who recognize that the crowd is nothing more than the sum of their individual choices, and make those choices accordingly" (*Expect Resistance* 112-113). This ideal fourth crowd, is essentially based upon a tenuous self-awareness; it is ostensibly comprised of individuals who are both actors and critics of the group's cohesive existence and power. It is a crowd that refuses to compromise individual desire and authenticity for the sake of an abstracted group identity, and so it is essentially an amorphous process which navigates the relationship between individual and crowd (instead of seeking, at best, a reductive conciliation of desire, and at worst, a sublimation of the individual for the sake of something larger than oneself).

CrimethInc. posits the seminal model for

this type of crowd to be the “affinity group,” a term so ubiquitous in the anarchist milieu that it possesses a highly contentious signification and is often used in ambiguous contexts. CrimethInc. defines this fourth type of crowd, the affinity group, as “a circle of friends who, knowing each other’s strengths, weaknesses, and backgrounds, and having already established a common language and healthy internal dynamic, set out to accomplish a goal or series of goals” (*Recipes* 28). Thus, this fourth type of crowd is not actually even a “crowd” at all – rather, it is a group of amiable associates who form a group together based on free association and who possess a profound understanding of each other’s intent.

CrimethInc.’s distinctive crowd theory is essential to understanding the ways in which they develop a discursive hermeneutics which attempts to dismantle conventional social modalities and create new social relationships built upon their own qualifiers for authenticity. It is in this way, that their writing on crowd theory is both explicitly articulating a desire for a more individual-affirming conception of crowd dynamics within a macro-social context, while implicitly describing the necessity to relate authentically at the micro-social or *interpersonal* level. It is a theory of opposition and negation, one asserting that:

“In our society, every effort is made to prevent people from coming together in masses, to prevent masses who have come together from recognizing themselves as masses, to

prevent masses that recognize themselves as such from gaining a sense of their power, and to prevent those who participate in masses that have a sense of their power from recognizing their own individual part in this power" (*Expect Resistance* 114).

While their analysis of the socio-cultural underpinnings of the ontological identity of crowds is articulated exhaustively, their prescriptions for countering the continuous societal prevention and subordination of said crowd identities locates resistance to the status quo of crowd dynamics in rather idealistic and somewhat simplistic terms. Their answer is based on the affinity of individuals in a group to create alternatives, as they simply state that if "a small group that behaves confidently as if they are living in a different world can call into question things everyone else takes for granted, they can render the impossible possible by persuading others that it is so on the strength of their own conviction" (*Expect Resistance* 114).

CrimethInc. goes to great lengths to articulate that this rather idyllic position is not coercive proselytizing. Yet this conclusion to an otherwise calculated and insightful analysis of crowd dynamics displays a certain naiveté towards the ways in which the individual, and the plurality of crowds one may contextually occupy, deals with the complicated nature (such as generalized questions of commodification, fabrication, self-definition, and authenticity) of their

own unique desires. The navigation between individual desire and its societal (crowd) context is tenuously complex, proposing that in order to authentically traverse this totalizing relationship “all it takes is for a few dreamers to practice believing and desiring outside the lines while resisting the quarantine of pigeonholing, then publicly demonstrate those dreams and their faith in them” (*Expect Resistance* 114). This is simply using grandiose rhetoric to obfuscate an inclusive resolution to their polemic.

# CrimethInc. on History and Myth

Temporality and its control, forms an integral part of the ideological foundation for CrimethInc.'s prescriptions for individual and, subsequently, collective liberation. Much of CrimethInc.'s rhetoric around temporality represents a quintessentially postmodern approach in its analysis, and as such, their treatment of *time* expansively addresses the ways in which it is ultimately experienced subjectively and qualitatively. For CrimethInc. the notion of time and the ways in which it has been codified, are inextricably related to the very systems of control that they ostensibly position themselves against. They argue that the very same defenses of time as objective and quantitative are the same defenses used in creating the singularity of history – a static representation of a finite past.

This critique of history as a fabricated construction with the intent, whether explicit or implicit, to ascribe and assert social power relations underscores the way in which the “objectivity” in history is inherently apart of a coercive structural schema. CrimethInc.’s approach to re-subjectivizing history is arguably a post-structuralist critique of the way in which history, the past’s symbolic representation in language, has been appropriated by and recuperated into systems of control and domination. Not content to merely negate the ways history functions as a conduit for oppression, CrimethInc. prescriptively claims that in order to de-objectivize history, individuals need to re-subjectivize present experience (which *time* is a part of). This essentially forms the basis of their linguistic-conceptual counterpoint to history: myth. For CrimethInc., myth exists as the antithesis to the hegemony of history. Thus, through ardently critiquing the ways in which history is inextricably related to power, CrimethInc. proposes a mythical alternative to the hegemonic control of experience.

CrimethInc.’s rhetoric frequently appeals to the reader’s pathos; their treatment of history is no different. They quite adroitly choose to refrain from entering into the conventional discourse of how those who possess the power to in effect “write” history are disenfranchising the power of entire groups of people to collectively define their past. This “*othered*” argumentation is indicative of much postcolonial rhetoric, and while CrimethInc. implicitly concedes that the subjugation



tion of many “people’s histories” is indeed a symptom of late-capitalist control, they are much more attracted to exploring how this hegemonic subjugation affects individuals more than groups. Thus, CrimethInc.’s critique of history is for the most part always centered upon the individual and their own subsequent liberation. In their essay “The Dead Hand of History,” CrimethInc. asserts that “the future ahead of you seems to have already been determined by your past” (*Days of War* 111). This appeal to causal determinism underscores the seeming totality of experience from what is essentially a structuralist premise. Claims such as these reinforce the notion that on an ontological level, existence within late-capitalism is codified, commodified, and predetermined as if it is a part of some grand narrative or systems theory. CrimethInc.’s logic here is paradoxical since they use this structuring as a means to contextualize their argument, which collaterally grants validity to the idea that such structural systems exist in the first place – yet they elucidate an argument that ultimately is poststructuralist and overtly critical of such systems theories.

CrimethInc. claims that history is stultifying solely because “it is the exclusive, anti-subjective nature of the thing: History (with a capital ‘H’) is purportedly seen by the objective eye of science, as if ‘from above;’ it demands that the individual value her impressions and experiences less than the official truth of the past” (*Days of War* 113). Here the rhetoric is accusatory in tone in so much as the established pre-

cedence of “history” is not merely objective, but *anti-subjective*. This linguistic choice of signifier, brimming with negation, is not merely indicative of contention, but reflects a state of outright hostility. This again refers back to CrimethInc.’s overarching project – the desire to see every individual liberate their desires from externalized forces of control. Not content to merely deconstruct the nuances of history and its objective pretense, CrimethInc.’s position is one of ontological war.

Here, it becomes important to note that *anti-subjectivity* for CrimethInc. is not only the premise of an oppositional stance to an individual’s own experience of existence, but rather it also acts as means to underscore the ways in which the relationship between subject and object is not benign, but rather inherently antagonistic – with the subject consistently relinquishing parts of its own being to the object. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer echo this sentiment in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, when they claim that “the history of civilization is the history of the introversion of sacrifice – in other words, the history of renunciation” (*Dialectic* 43). Thus history as *anti-subjectivity* necessitates that the individual as subject concede the authority to define *being* to objective conditions and relations.

An Adornian reading of this relationship “relies on the renunciation of the immediate satisfaction of impulse in exchange for its continued existence. The problem with this [...] is that what is given back to the self – its continued existence – is not equivalent

to what it has relinquished” (Wilson 18-19). The claim that this exchange is essentially and perpetually imbalanced is also at the core of CrimethInc.’s understanding of the way in which power flows through the relationships between subject and object.

Adorno’s concept of the renunciation of self is re-positied by CrimethInc. as a call to reclaim the individual’s space of being: “The past is an adversary to action in the present, an ever-increasing force of inertia that must be overcome” (*Days of War* 111). Thus, the renunciation of self leads to the totalizing construction of objective history. Yet within this claim is the redemptive fact that it is none other than the self, whom relinquishes these aspirations to define the ontology of their experience, which necessitates the fact that it is within the purview of the individual to defiantly take back this authority. CrimethInc. has no illusions as to the difficulty of such a revolutionary project, as while they indeed argue that the flow of power within the dialectical relationship between subject and object can be reversed, it is nevertheless and incredibly arduous task that lay before the revolutionary subject. They claim that “each of us is dominated by history: the past lies upon us like a dead hand, guiding and controlling as if from the grave. At the same time as it gives the individual a conception of herself, an ‘identity,’ it piles weight upon her that she must fight to shake off if she is to remain light and free enough to continue reinventing herself” (*Days of War* 111). Here again, CrimethInc. enters into

what is essentially a poststructuralist discourse in that they create ontological spaces of alterity, which remove the authorship of individual experience and being away from hegemonic systems/structures of control. This rupture of being typifies a type of break which, if it is not vigilant in terms of understanding its social context, can easily be recuperated into reifying the very objective structures/systems it is ostensibly in opposition to.

CrimethInc. argues that this recuperation often manifests itself as the creation of “new” subjectivities which, “become trapped by the very systems they create, just as these systems trap those [subjectivities] who come after” (*Days of War* 111). This is a case against the formation of an individual ontology that reduces itself to an ardent solipsism; an extremist subjectivity, which paradoxically reasserts a logic that is self-destructive rather than self-affirming. Within an Adornian context, this recuperation becomes evident in the instances when “the more that subjectivity posits itself over and against objectivity, the more it becomes like the objectivity which it has drained of any inherent meaning which it opposes” (Wilson 18). While this claim is obtusely self-contradictory it reiterates Adorno’s concept of “negative dialectics” in that just as there are limits to knowledge (against the conventional Hegelian notion of a “true” synthesis resolving itself out of the dialectical relationship), so too are there limits to the degree to which one can subjectively define their own history.

Adorno claims that this extremist subjectivity is

dangerous, in that it falsely represents the existence of a pure individual autonomy. This underscores the way that subjective “thought is reified as an autonomous process, aping the machine it has itself produced, so that it can finally be replaced by the machine” (*Dialectic* 19). This is specifically a critique of post-Enlightenment thought; which is based on the objective pretense of *reason*, rather than an individualized experience that denies categorical imperatives.

Adorno emphasizes the way that “thinking makes itself like a machine so that merely mechanical processes of thought come to replace genuine conceptual effort and cognition. Instrumental thinking destroys thinking” (Wilson 18). Although not explicitly stated within CrimethInc.’s prescriptive analysis of objective history, the notion of deluding oneself into fully defining a reductive “identity” of being based solely on the pretense that one’s experience is ultimately a solipsistic act of pure authorial definition, is similar to Adorno’s claim that thinking that attempts to arrive at truths through reason is paradoxically subverting any aspirations towards asserting some semblance of subjective authenticity. This is essentially a “self-preserving reason that forgets why it preserves itself – or, to put it another way, that gives up everything for which it lives in order merely that it continue to live – becomes self-destructive” (Wilson 19). Thus, a re-subjectification of history that arrives at a sort of ultimate identity of the individual, is not where

CrimethInc. intends for its anti-subjective view of the historization of power to conclude. Instead they argue for a conception of experience that does away with the conventional linearity of time altogether; for they assert that “it is not just official history that paralyzes us, it is the very idea of the past itself” (*Days of War* 113). This claim expands the scope of their polemic to include opposition not only to the ways history has become merely another institution of power (one that authoritatively locates and defines an external and “authentic” version of the past), but the existential nature of the “past” as an actual temporal state.

Whereas “history” describes how external forces of control inscribe the limits of individual experience, the “past” describes how this control has been internalized by the individual. Thus the relationship between the authorial power of “history” and the temporal structure of the “past” is a symbiotic one, in the sense that they are concepts of domination depending on each other to be further propagated. The individual encounters history as extrinsic control, but by thinking in terms of linear temporality they display how permeated structures of domination have become; not only in terms of these structures being ingrained within the individual, but also how they function as a means to categorically understand and interpret experience, much in the same way language functions as interpretive structuring. CrimethInc. challenges the reader to:

“Try thinking of the world as including all past

and future time as well as present space. An individual can at least hope to have some control over that part of the world which is in the future; but the past only acts on her, she can never act back upon it. If she thinks of the world (whether that 'world' consists of her life, or human history) as consisting of mostly future, proportionately speaking, she will see herself as fairly free to choose her own destiny and exert her will upon the world. But if her world-view places most of the world in the past, that puts her in a position of powerlessness: not only is she unable to act upon or create most of world in which she exists, but what future does remain is already largely predetermined by the effects of events past" (*Days of War* 113).

Here CrimethInc. reduces temporality to no more than thought, and in so doing implicitly recreates the classical debate between free will and determinism. However, what distances their claim from this classic dichotomy is the way their language is intentionally removed from directly engaging in this discourse. Because CrimethInc. is attempting to convey a conception of experience in which past, present, and future are coalesced into a single loci of existence, the veracity of either free will or determinism is inconsequential here. Instead, what gains primacy in their rhetoric is the individual's conception of these ideas; the dichotomy is not externalized here as it is in the classical debate surrounding these ideas.

Both free will and determinism are an external means to codify experience, in so much as they refer to meaning within a given trajectory of being. Yet, if (as in CrimethInc.'s case) this trajectory is not a trajectory at all, but rather a single point, then both free will and determinism are no longer subject to an external essence but rather belong entirely to the individual's given perspective. It is what the individual "thinks of the world" (*Days of War* 113) which informs whether or not their existence is predestined (the hyper-actualized form of control) or subject to their own will. Thus, time itself and one's experience of it operate according to fundamentally different logic. For CrimethInc. this temporal/experiential disconnect is central to their argument against history, in that they concede that "time may well extend before and behind us infinitely, but that is not how we experience the world, and that is not how we must visualize it either if we want to find any meaning in it" (*Days of War* 113). Thus, the primacy of experience over objective history forms their argumentative precursor to the construction of meaning. If this logic is further extrapolated then, paradoxically, the construction of individual meaning is essentially an anti-historical project – and if this anti-historical project does indeed construct individual meaning then it informs a plurality of radical epistemologies.

The relationship between epistemology and history is at the foundation of much of Theodor Adorno's work as well. Adornian thought claims that "to un-



derstand the world means relating thought to history, and without freezing either: an eternal and unchanging world to be manipulated by an invincible thought" (Thomson 108). Yet whereas CrimethInc. fully ascribes to the notion that the individual can "step *outside* of history" (*Days of War* 114) into an entirely new episteme, Adornian thought much less romantically claims that in regards to meaning and history that "our consideration of one or the other can only be mediated" (Thomson 108). Thus, where CrimethInc. is quick to assert the absolute validity of using individual experience to construct individual meaning, Adorno is more cautious in that his project includes a calculated attempt at exploring the nature of *meaning itself* before attempting to address the ways in which history informs epistemology. This mediation between history and meaning, constructs Adorno's own epistemological approach, one which sees itself "within its context, but also as an attempt to come to terms with its context: not by trying to master it (subordinate or exhaust it) by reducing it to a context, but by seeking to open philosophy up to its context again (which it has generally sought to cut off)" (Thomson 108). Thus, by refusing to use a fixed conception of history as the basis to establish his epistemology, Adorno (and CrimethInc. to a certain extent as well) allows for the construction of meaning to be just as amorphous as the construction of historical objectivity.

For both CrimethInc. and Adorno, the relationship between hegemonic epistemologies and historical

objectivity is ultimately one about power, and it follows that if the way in which meaning is constructed is authoritatively defined and subsequently buttressed by historical imperatives then the flow of power relations is also an exercise in control. Much more so for CrimethInc. than Adorno, the power exerted by these hegemonic epistemologies is an immediate cause for contention – one that, according to the morality laid out by CrimethInc., needs to be destroyed. Epistemology as the site of power forms the basis of CrimethInc.'s political critique of history. In their essay "History as We Live It," CrimethInc. asserts that "today we are in the belly of a hierarchical leviathan, which naturally tells the stories of other hierarchical empires as the history of the human race: contests for economic and political power, books of laws and philosophical rationalizing, the trivia of the lives of 'great men'" (*Expect Resistance* 277). Aside from this assertion echoing conventional postcolonial discourses on the right to self-definition, this claim also underscores the way in which *meaning* is not neutral, but rather is always related to discourses of power.

To support this reasoning CrimethInc. uses a quasi-anthropological approach in their unsubstantiated claim that "if some of the earliest historical records are of wars and conquest it is because the first peoples to catch the disease of so-called civilization were the first to conquer and keep tally" (*Expect Resistance* 279). Here CrimethInc., in an attempt to elucidate history's non-neutrality, draws a causal connec-

tion from the act of historical documentation (which to a certain extent is the creation of objective history) to conquest. This is the explicit political project of lessening the gap between empire and the empirical, something which Adorno's work addresses as well.

For Adorno, "however much logical or formal modes of argument claim to be neutral historically, or purely empirical, they carry with them a claim to be not just true to the world of experience, but 'truer' than other forms" (Thomson 109). This is essentially a postmodern critique of hegemonic epistemology, and this parallels CrimethInc.'s own conception of how power flows throughout the construction of meaning. This need to possess power and subordinate dissent *becomes* the need to not only affirm a singular history as the dominant discourse, but negate the truth of other histories as well. It is this negative impulse, the one which moves from the realm of positively asserting dominance to imperializing control by destroying alterity, which is most oppressive in terms of hegemonic epistemology for CrimethInc.

It is precisely this view of history, one as negating all other claims to experience, that Michel Foucault (in his essay, "The Subject and Power") claims is an inherently postmodern dilemma: "And nowadays, the struggle against the forms of subjection – against the submission of subjectivity – is becoming more and more important, even though the struggles against forms of domination and exploitation have not disappeared"

(Foucault 130). What typifies CrimethInc.'s assessment of this "submission of subjectivity" is the fact that it is indeed a *struggle*, a social war waged everyday on levels of both importance and banality. It is systematic domination casting itself fully within the authorial role, creating objectivity as a means to exercise this control. According to this logic, this power entrenches its position within a totalizing epistemology of coercion, of which all other competing epistemes are subsumed and eventually excised as actual systems of meaning. Whereas Foucault is more concerned with addressing the nature of power, CrimethInc. has no qualms about adopting a prescriptive position. In countering the hegemony of objective history as a means to reify control, CrimethInc. resorts once again to the primacy of the individual and its subjective experience. CrimethInc. uses the importance of individual perspective as the foundation for their opposition to history's anti-subjective nature. This opposition comes about through the championing of myth as the foundation for the creation of individualized ontologisms.

CrimethInc. frames myth as "history without time" (*Days of War* 114). Oddly enough, this proves to be a semantic break from the debate in which they *politicize* epistemology. While they are hypercritical of the role that history plays in terms of exerting oppressive flows of control, their prescriptive suggestion to counter this hegemony of meaning is no counter at all; it is instead an earnest attempt to remove the individual from this very

discourse itself. CrimethInc. is explicit in their arguing that it is not within their purview nor their desire to rewrite and reappropriate objective history; they claim that “the solution is not to combat their supposed ‘objective truths’ with more claims to Historical Truth – for it is not *more* past we need, to weigh upon us, but more attention to today” (*Days of War* 114). Thus the alternative they propose runs counter to such conventional alternatives such as dialectical materialism or much postcolonial rhetoric, in that CrimethInc. is not concerned with correcting wrong accounts of some subverted past. Their conception of myth is one rooted in an extreme egoism, where meaning only signifies anything to the individual and the collectivity of experience is subordinate to this first caveat.

CrimethInc. is careful to first fully explore the linguistic connotation of the word “myth,” before proffering it as their alternate epistemology. They claim that their conception of the term is “not the obscurist superstitions and holy lies of religion and capitalism, but the democratic myths of storytellers” (*Days of War* 114). It is the egalitarian nature of myth that CrimethInc. chooses to appropriate for their argument, where myth is diametrically opposed to stasis – it is allowed to evolve and be enacted upon by enumerable agents of change. These are not the myths of Joseph Campbell’s antiquity; and CrimethInc. would perhaps argue that what – within the narcissism of the “Western” literary and historical traditions – are called the myths of the “classical era”

are essentially not “myths” at all but reified histories of empires now past. Instead, their conception of myth is mirrored much in the way that CrimethInc. as an amorphous “group” exists and conducts their projects.

Within the myth of CrimethInc. *as a collective*, no specific authorial claims are made, and many conceptions of what “CrimethInc.” actually *is* are allowed to simultaneously support and contradict other such claims. Responding to the charge that CrimethInc.’s stated goals for liberation are mere myths bordering on the naïve, surreal, and impossible they state: “That’s why myths, as intimations of what could be, are so much more powerful than facts today – even though (no, *because*) they may not be based on things that are ‘objectively true’ of the world right now. CrimethInc. itself is mostly a myth right now – but a myth that has *power*, because it points towards a world most of us want more than this one” (*Days of War* 174). Here, as in almost all of CrimethInc.’s writing, the central focus is on both the way that power operates on a macro-social scale, and perhaps more importantly, how the individual can reclaim this power through fully articulating and acting upon their liberated desires.

The power of myth, as defined by CrimethInc., is that it possesses the ability to allude to the infinite possibilities and pluralities of the future. This logic depends on the assertion that objective history’s power lies in its ability to authoritatively delineate a logical sequence of events – *the historical process* – which,

while constructing a singularity of meaning for the past, is also effectively defining the future itself. Thus, the historicizing of experience is perhaps most oppressive in the sense that it creates a logical continuum, one in which the future is already causally determined by the past.

Myth represents a rupture in this totalizing logic of experience. CrimethInc. argues that “we can’t look backwards for precedents, only look forward to try to make this wild dream a reality once and for all. No one has ever tried this before – that’s why it’s going to work” (*Days of War* 174). Here epistemology gives way to ontology, in so much as myth presents a *space of being* which allows for the creation of meaning(s). Yet within this romantic claim, CrimethInc. does not address what happens in terms of reification – if myth does indeed become reality. While CrimethInc. dismisses these questions in a rather cursory manner, Theodor Adorno locates this discourse entirely within the dialectical relationship between reason and myth.

Adorno’s conception of myth as opposition to hegemonic epistemology is similar to CrimethInc.’s own notion of the term in the sense that, as Adorno scholar Yianna Liastos claims, it “is wary of the legitimating authority of rationalism and its bureaucratized reality” (Liasos 144). Yet, to fully understand Adorno’s treatment of myth, it must be contextualized against his conception of the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment for Adorno is “the concept of progressive thought” (*Odysseus* 110). It is the adherence to the belief

that epistemology is totalizing, and the barriers to absolute knowledge are only rooted within temporality. Following this logic, *everything* can and will eventually be known. This is the science of reason, a linear trajectory towards an all-encompassing objectivity.

Adorno contends that this progressive logic is deeply rooted within systems of control and the reification of power; he contends that fascism is itself a logical outcome of the faith of enlightened liberalism. At its most expansive, myth for Adorno is “a level of consciousness that has still not formed a fixed identity” (*Odysseus* 130). The problematic nature of “identity” is dealt with by CrimethInc. as well: “Identity, as a concept, works in terms of contrast: one ‘is’ a fill-in-the-blank, as opposed to the ‘others,’ who are not...thus, to the desperate lost soul of modern society, nothing is more precious than opponents, people to despise, so he can reassure himself of his own worth: as a faithful patron of brand X ideology, for example” (*Days of War* 135). Within the context of reason, reductive identity politics is the logical outcome of turning hegemonic epistemology onto the definition of self. It is the internalized acquiescence to externalized roles of being; the subscription to qualitative assessments of selfhood by extrinsic authorship. While identity politics as a post-Enlightenment outcome is perhaps indicative of the contemporary claims to authorial hegemony within post-industrial, globalized late-capitalism – Adorno’s location of the basis of this discourse as being rooted



within the relationship of Enlightenment to myth is still relevant to the larger argument being discussed.

For Adorno, once the fixity of identity becomes established and subsequently reified, it is the creation and entrenchment of reason – the progressive linearity of enlightenment. Within this discursive relationship it becomes evident that “for Adorno [...] enlightenment opposes itself to myth. In particular, enlightenment is aimed at freeing humankind from the fear inherent in mythical ways of constructing the world” (Wilson 12). By proactively inverting this claim, CrimethInc. expands upon Adorno’s concept of myth, by embracing it as the radical alternative to objectivity and history. They assert that “myth makes no claims to false impartiality or objective Truth, it does not purport to offer an exhaustive explanation of the cosmos” (*Days of War* 114). While CrimethInc. posits this dichotomy between myth and history as a relationship between two related yet entirely distinct concepts, Adorno is more hesitant to arrive at such hasty conclusions. For Adorno the relationship between Enlightenment (reason) and myth (nature) is most definitely a dialectical one, in which both concepts contain within their own respective essences, aspects of each other. The simplicity with which CrimethInc. asserts that history can be circumvented by merely mythologizing individual experience is all but absent from Adorno’s analysis of Enlightenment and myth as dialectical signification.

According to Adornian thought, the problem

with bifurcating Enlightenment and myth into their own respective isolationist positions, is that to a certain extent the same rationalizing impulse to ascribe or construct meaning to experience underlies *both* concepts. While this rationalizing impulse manifests itself within enlightened thought as an attempt to codify, standardize, and authoritatively singularize experience into something which is to be coercively relevant to the collective – myth is still functioning according to this same basic logic, albeit on a much smaller scale and perhaps without the imperialistic aspirations to dominate through the creation of its own epistemology. Writing on Adorno and Max Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, critic Alexander Garcia Duttmann elucidates this quintessentially Adornian perspective: "Myth is itself historical, the result of an early process of enlightenment [...] and contains within itself the possibility of enlightenment. Enlightenment for its part implies the possibility of the mythical, of a violent reification, and can assert itself against myth only to the extent that it becomes mythical" (Duttmann 145). This dialectical premise articulates the way in which the reification of *myth as history* is always a contingency, in the sense that even myth is encapsulated by its own epistemology, its own reason for being. Thus, for Adorno the assumption that myth exists as a genuine alternative to objective history is an irrelevant point. More important for Adorno is attempting to understand how power flows through this dialectical relationship.

CrimethInc. sees no need to fully exhaust this point; their polemic is based solely on the postulation that history and myth are opposing forces – sides to be taken. Perhaps this is indeed a more extremist position to adhere to, yet this perspective is situated within an earnest desire to do away with the same authoritarian trappings of objective reason that Adorno also contests. In his most explicit critiques of the political ramifications of Enlightenment logic, Adorno often uses rhetoric very similar to that of CrimethInc.: “The most primitive myth already contains the element of falsehood that triumphs in the fraudulence of fascism, a deceitfulness that fascism imputes to enlightenment” (*Odysseus* 111). Here, apart from the obvious similarities in rhetoric, is the main ideological difference between Adorno and CrimethInc.’s conception of history (Enlightenment) and myth. Adorno is skeptical that myth itself can be posited as untarnished by the impulse of authoritative epistemology, whereas CrimethInc. not only claims that this can be done, but they make it a central imperative of their whole polemic.

As CrimethInc. positions myth as being the most liberated space to construct an individual ontology within, it necessarily follows that even a plurality of defiantly singular ontologies must have some semblance of communal relevance or their whole argument simply regresses into an extreme form of egoism bordering on solipsism. CrimethInc. addresses the collectivization of myth through claiming that:

“Myth belongs to everyone, as it is made and remade by everyone, so it can never be used by one group to lord itself over another. And it does not paralyze – instead of trapping people in the chains of cause and effect, myth makes them conscious of the enormous range of possibilities that their own lives have to offer; instead of making them feel hopelessly small in a vast and uncaring universe, it centers the world again on their own experiences and ambitions as represented by those of others” (*Days of War* 114).

Here, in what is perhaps their most articulate explication of their use of the term myth, CrimethInc. becomes mired in their own postmodern rhetoric. Their claims that myth is “made and remade by everyone” and that individual experience and ambition are often “represented by those of others” point to the way in which Adorno argues that present in all myth is the beginning of Enlightenment – the attempt to create authoritative epistemologies. On the surface, CrimethInc.’s postmodern rhetoric seems to argue that it is through its very ability to evolve that myth gains its oppositional strength against the crushing weight of history and its objective machinations, yet what they fail to contend with, or address in any way, is how history is often presented in the same way as their notion of myth.

Histories representing pluralized alterities are often recuperated into grand social narratives, and thus what once was oppositional has now become

“remade.” CrimethInc. overlooks the fact that myth, as the representation of individualized experience, often functions according to the same logic as hegemonic histories of power and control. Both attempt to define experience, and in so doing, myth cannot actually belong to “everyone” just as history cannot. Thus, the romantic call that CrimethInc. makes to its readership:

“Let’s make the leap out of History, and make the moments of our daily lives the world we live in and care about – only then can we make it into a place that has meaning for us. The present belongs to those who are able to seize it, to recognize all that is and can be!” (*Days of War* 115)

This alludes to the way in which CrimethInc. is blissfully unaware of how their argument against history is merely functioning within the mutually-reflective dialectics of Adorno’s conception of Enlightenment and myth.

To “make meaning,” “to seize,” and “recognize all that is and can be” are all appeals to grandiosity which in the midst of their hyperbole, fail to comprehend the ways in which, as Adornian thought would lead one to believe, it is not necessarily the failure of what is already in existence which impedes any revolutionary change, but rather it is that the possibilities yet to come have already been defined.

# CrimethInc. on Culture, Power, and Antiauthoritarianism

At its core, CrimethInc.'s project attempts to understand and elucidate the ways that power is possessed and asserted, as it is the explication of a lifestyle philosophy which aims at abolishing all systems of domination and control. CrimethInc.'s analysis moves the main site of this struggle from the traditional Marxist location in *labor*, to a social war which finds itself waged in *culture* – ultimately, giving this dynamic an inherently postmodern character. As they claim in *Expect Resistance*, “Forget about the factories – culture is the ultimate means of production, the one that produces human life itself. Not to worry

– it can be seized and shared like any other!” (*Expect Resistance* 113). Here CrimethInc. contends that culture is the main discourse which power flows through, and as such, any polemics of opposition need to genuinely evaluate how the propagation of culture becomes synonymous with the propagation of control.

This is an approach which is not necessarily new to anticapitalist critique as it is clearly evident in the Frankfurt School’s post-Marxism, Foucault’s poststructuralism, and the American New Left in the 1960s and 1970s. Yet what makes CrimethInc.’s treatment of this approach novel is that it is clearly situated within the North American anarchist milieu, and the fact that this trajectory of thought has to a large extent contributed to the resurgence of anarchist praxis within the United States during the first decade of the twenty-first century. While anarchism in other parts of the world is often expressed through the more classical currents of anarcho-syndicalism or anarcho-communism which, like traditional Marxist praxis, is centered on class and labor – the contemporary wave of American anarchism tends to be more removed from this dynamic and instead is more concerned with waging resistance within culture itself. This contrasting inclination may be indicative of many “American” characteristics, but it is most likely that it is a reflection of the United States’ position as the dominant socio-political force in a highly globalized late-capitalist world. It is perhaps this near global hegemony that the North American anarchist

milieu is responding to, when the cultural becomes the political; for while the United States is one of the largest consumers of imported products, it is undoubtedly the controlling manufacturer of exported culture.

In order to follow CrimethInc.'s trajectory of thought into the alternatives to existence underneath the oppressive dictates of capitalism, it necessitates a clear understanding of what they in fact mean when they use the term "culture." In what amounts to both recognition of their forebears, and a succinct evaluation of the task at hand, CrimethInc. quotes from the Dada journal *Icarus Was Right* in their essay "From Over-the-Counter-Culture to Beneath the Underground":

"Culture: a) the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group. b) the set of shared attitudes, values, goals and practices that characterizes a defined group. Hopefully it is obvious after reading the above definition that culture, any culture, is inherently evil and problematic. Who wants to have to conform, and force others to conform, to the predefined beliefs and values of a 'racial, religious, or social group?'" (*Days of War* 84).

CrimethInc., through the appropriation of this Dadaist quotation, focuses their critique of culture on the authorial role, on the power that exerts itself in externalized definition. How this power of definition becomes internalized, and ultimately socialized, falls within the purview of culture. CrimethInc. calls into



question exactly how many of these “attitudes, values, goals and practices” are indeed freely “shared” by a given group, or how many individuals become victims of cultural coercion without even being aware of it. Certain schools of thought defend the conformity of culture by arguing that almost all social interactions require a base level of adherence to convention, otherwise they would not be social interactions at all. CrimethInc. is of the belief that the social is not inextricably linked to the hegemony of culture, so communal interactions non-coercively based on free-association can indeed occur and it is precisely towards a society composed of relationships like these which the radical individual should be fighting for.

CrimethInc.’s assertion that “culture is the ultimate means of production” (*Expect Resistance* 113) is implicitly an Adornian claim. Elaborating upon a term he and Max Horkheimer coined in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno in a 1967 essay entitled “Culture Industry Revisited” explores how culture does not spontaneously arise, but is instead *produced*. Adorno claims that he and Horkheimer were first using the term “mass culture” to develop their ideas around this phenomena, but instead chose to use the term “culture industry” as a means to clearly “exclude from the outset the interpretation agreeable to its advocates” (*Culture* 12). Therefore, Adorno attempts to convey a notion of mass culture as discursively negative, one that contains in its signification the idea that culture is manufactured. Adorno

goes on to declare that the culture industry is at once self-reflective and, paradoxically, self-alienated. It is self-reflective in the sense that this industry knows that it is nothing if not a sum of its parts (the individual proclivities which constitute a popular mass). Yet, it is also self-alienated since those participating in the culture industry are at once active producers and passive consumers. The habituation of their consumption of “culture” is actually what produces it in the first place, thus the culture industry is where the “mass” produces the very systems of entrapment that they ultimately *choose* to consume.

Adorno elaborates on this concept by asserting that “the culture industry fuses the old and familiar into a new quality. In all its branches, products which are tailored for consumption by masses, and which to a great extent determine the nature of that consumption, are manufactured more or less according to plan” (*Culture* 12). While on the surface this claim seems to echo a structuralist approach to absolutist structures and totalizing systems (Adorno claims that the culture industry operates “according to plan”), it is actually a problematized conception of the methods of consumption and production in the context of culture, as both the creation of culture and its procurement are mutually dependent. This is an inherently post-Marxist notion, through the recognition that that which is consumed is produced, not the other way around.

CrimethInc. concurs with Adorno: their polemic also attempts to elucidate the ways in which

culture is commodified, and thus is subject to the same conventions ascribed to such reification. Being subject to reification ostensibly means that now, *a thing* is ascribed meaning through externalized definition. These definitions are imposed limitations to *a thing's* essence – the reduction to a commodity. CrimethInc. argues that “culture itself consists of prescribed limitations upon the actions, interactions, and even thoughts of human beings. These limitations can be beneficial [...] but they can also limit human beings in dangerous ways” (*Days of War* 84). Through this insistence, CrimethInc. engages in a discourse uninterested in self-righteously moralizing cultural content. They are more intrigued by the exploration of the limits to what is contained within the signification of culture; how the implicit restrictions of the *form* allow for control and power to be exercised. CrimethInc. is refusing to enter into a discussion reduced to identity politics, one concerned with how the content, not the form, of culture contributes to oppression. For example, instead of engaging in a dialogue about how sexism is inherently apart of the hegemonic control structured into most “cultures” (a position situated within identity politics), CrimethInc. would perhaps be more willing to discuss how the very conception of culture approximates falsehoods based on fixity and stasis when in reality all individual experience is a fluid construct.

CrimethInc. claims that the imposition of definition, the clear delineation reinforced by culture

and its constructs, is “hostile to human happiness” (*Days of War* 84). This hostility is manifested through the inability to divorce the consumption of culture from its own production. This also taints any claims to authentically assess culture from an unbiased objective standpoint. This Adornian notion of the culture industry as self-perpetuating, strongly warns against the logical fallacy of attempting to exist outside of culture as a means to authoritatively locate and qualify it. Adorno scholar Alex Thomson claims that this cautioning “means looking at culture from the inside, as a project doomed to perpetuate itself only through vicious and violent contradictions; but also from the outside, as a determined historical and political project, and therefore neither a natural nor the only possible one” (Thomson 28). Thus, the analysis from within culture *of culture* is a position (actual) which is still subject to the machinations of culture as a whole and therefore is not even removed from it; while the analysis of culture from an ontology outside of it (theoretical) falls into the quandary of creating meaning, which subsequently becomes hegemonic epistemology.

Here, culture and the mass it purports to represent, are nonessential false signifiers. For, as Adorno claims, “Thus, although the culture industry undeniably speculates on the conscious and unconscious state of the millions towards which it is directed, the masses are not primary, but secondary, they are an object of calculation; an appendage of the machinery” (*Culture* 12).

The commodification at the foundation of the culture industry depends on the incorporation of the “masses” into the very apparatus itself. Culture is not *acted upon*, instead it merely *acts* – and the culture industry maintains the spectacle that presents the consumption of the masses as something extrinsic to the entire production relationship, when this is simply not the case.

CrimethInc.’s motives for seriously challenging the validity of qualifying individual experience in terms of culture are inherently anti-deterministic; for much in the same way that they treat history as the static control of temporality (what *was* experienced), they critique culture as the static control of belief (what *can be* experienced). They are ideologically against the passivity of experience that culture necessitates, as evidenced by their claim that “culture does not dictate human behavior – it is the sum of human behavior” (*Expect Resistance* 44). Thus, despite what the conventional discourses surrounding popular culture suggest, the culture industry is not by the people nor is it for the people, it is instead the reification of certain limits of control. Ostensibly CrimethInc.’s aspirations for an *anti-cultural* existence (the term counter-cultural cannot work here, as it is a means to merely proffer a competing system of reification and definition) stems from the position that culture, and in the more specific Adornian sense, the culture industry, should not be re-appropriated. This is because it will always set the terms and conditions for how an individual should codify experi-

ence and as such, is an obstacle to authentic liberation.

The question of authenticity pervading much of CrimethInc.'s work is also evident within Adorno's critique of the culture industry. As Adorno scholar Ross Wilson further expounds upon authenticity, he claims that "the culture industry does not facilitate real spontaneity or real choices. The appearances of spontaneity and choice are actually functions of the way in which the culture industry makes sure it has everyone in its grip" (Wilson 32). Thus, not only does culture serve as the demarcation of what is within the limits of acceptable human experience, but it also is complicit in furthering a deterministic dynamic of control – one which uses the pretense of choice as a means to have both the individual and the "mass" self-perpetuate the very flows of power that ultimately keep them subordinate to externalities.

For Adorno, authenticity, if it is ever to exist, is essentially a question about aesthetics. He claims that the closest thing to a pure autonomy can only be actualized as art. Yet it is precisely this notion of autonomy through a radical aesthetics against which he posits the culture industry. Any such attempts to explore the aesthetics of autonomy are "tendentially eliminated by the culture industry, with or without the conscious will of those in control. The latter include both those who carry out directives as well as those who hold the power" (*Culture* 13). It is important to note that this elimination of autonomy as art, does not depend on "conscious will." This is what frames both Adorno's and

CrimethInc.'s conceptions of culture as fundamentally being what amounts to a poststructuralist discourse. Presupposing some concrete loci of control and juxtaposing that against the "masses" in a clean, convenient dichotomization is not a part of either of their critiques. Instead, both Adorno and CrimethInc. claim that given the capitalist context that the individual finds oneself in, no complete selfhood exists, hereby nullifying the supposition of a community of many complete selfhoods – the theoretical notion of culture.

While they clearly have similar analyses of how culture and control are intertwined, it is what they offer in the way of prescriptive alternatives that widens the ideological gap between Adorno and CrimethInc. Adorno's position reveals a much more reserved approach to the problematization of culture, in the sense that his main philosophical project in this context is ultimately one of negation. He discounts the ability to evade the trappings of consumption and the embedding of cultural discourses within the very apparatuses of capitalist hegemony, except through an exploration of the autonomy of art – a radical aesthetics. His critique of the Enlightenment and its subsequent manifestation as the supremacy of reason, reveals an explicit disdain for the pretense of progress.

While CrimethInc. does not necessarily espouse their *anticulturalism* as a way to progress towards a utopian existence, Adorno would nonetheless be critical of their cavalier certainty in their prescrip-

tions. For Adorno, “the possibility of genuine progress cannot be presumed: and Adorno’s own relentless work of criticism implies that the negation or refutation of every movement which claims to be progress is preferable to embracing and affirming particular forms of social or cultural resistance” (Thomson 75). It is here where the difference between Adorno and CrimethInc. is most glaring, for while Adorno’s negative project is solely a critical inquiry into the validity of progress itself, CrimethInc.’s positive project consistently eschews theoretical abstractions for immediate interventions of praxis. Adornian thought could be sympathetic to CrimethInc.’s analysis of the control within culture-as-medium, yet it would most likely claim as implausible CrimethInc.’s call to leave culture altogether.

For CrimethInc. there is no such thing as truly benign culture, instead they counter that “culture is *always* a dangerous phenomena, not just when it teaches sexism and racism – because while every culture teaches certain values and ways of doing things, prescribing them as if they are right for everyone, human beings are all different and have different needs” (*Days of War* 84-85). Here they adopt a universalistic approach to the problem of reconciling an individual’s different “needs.” It is also important to note that whereas CrimethInc. usually uses active terms like “desire” to proclaim their stated goals of absolute liberation, here they choose to use the much more passive signifier “needs.” While this may



simply be exhausting the semantics, it is nonetheless telling that CrimethInc. frames culture as failing to meet an individual's "needs," rather than culture being the manifestation of one's "desires." Regardless of the semantics behind their critique of culture, it is significant that CrimethInc. is rearticulating the post-World War II, postmodern rhetoric surrounding the discursive leap from monolithic culture to the totalitarian state. It is the admission that culture can lead to such drastic social constructions as fascism or fervent nationalism, or perhaps less dramatically, the genuine repression of individual identity.

Whereas Adorno's theoretical stance entails a sustained inquiry into the pretense of culture and progress, CrimethInc. opts out of the paradigm altogether. Before they attempt to elucidate what such a position actually entails, they make the following qualifying statement: "Of course it is impossible to eradicate culture from our lives. The idea itself is ridiculous – everything we are is a result of culture" (*Days of War* 85). This concession proves to be less convincing than their rejection of history in favor of myth, in so much as CrimethInc. articulates a position here which is extremely critical of the way in which control is so pervasively embedded within culture and its subsequent recuperation and commodification – only to arrive at a conclusion which pales in comparison to the adroitness of their analysis. They claim that "the solution, instead, is to be wary of culture and

tradition: never to accept them as given but rather to choose what is right for you at the time and reject the rest. Keep a clear awareness of how your behavior, attitudes, and ideas are shaped by the culture or cultures around you" (*Days of War* 85-86). Oddly enough, in their inability to fully remove the individual from culture they arrive at a prescriptive position, that in a subtly reserved manner is more akin to Adorno's charge (which is to be ever vigilant and negate all claims to progress through exposing the culture industry for its true aspirations of domination and subservience).

Adorno ends his essay "Culture Industry Reconsidered" by reiterating his belief that the culture industry "becomes mass deception and is turned into a means for fettering consciousness. It impedes the development of autonomous, independent individuals who judge and decide consciously for themselves" (*Culture* 19). Here Adorno's conclusion closely resembles CrimethInc.'s in the sense that it reasserts the need for "autonomous" and "independent" individuals, but whereas CrimethInc. focuses on how the individual can respond to the oppressive nature of culture, Adorno chooses to accentuate the way in which culture oppresses the nature of the autonomous individual. Thus, while on a superficial level these two conclusions to the problematic disposition of culture, temporally separated by almost half a century, seem to contain resemblances of cohesion, what is actually being articulated could not be further from such an assumption.

CrimethInc. clearly conveys a position that, acknowledging the impossibility of entirely evading the forced definitions and reductive limitations of culture, cautions the individual to be alert to how culture possess, defines, and controls one's own ontological essence. They suggest that the enterprising radical take back from culture what it initially appropriated from the individual in its own process of production. They defiantly advise the individual to "take what [cultures] work for you and leave the rest – then there will be no danger that you will be lead astray by any of them" (*Days of War* 86). Thus, CrimethInc.'s alternative to the hegemony of culture is the disassembling of certain aspects of said hegemony, in order to create a bricolaged *culture of one*. Adorno's conclusion is much less optimistic, and much less emphasis is placed on the redemptive power of individual inclination. Instead, Adorno merely states that culture industry becomes "mass deception" which "impedes" autonomy; no actual prescriptions are made and his polemic ends on this facile negation. While both CrimethInc. and Adorno may arrive at different conclusions in terms of explicating the problematic aspects of culture, one thing explicitly resonates through both theoretical approaches: the relationship between culture and power.

As is characteristic of almost all strains of anarchist thought, CrimethInc. locates power within a schema structured according to hierarchy. Compared to orthodox Marxism, this notion of how power flows is

much more expansive. This is an important distinction to be made; orthodox Marxism essentially focuses on only one hierarchical relationship of power – namely that of class struggle – and in so doing eschews claims to authority on other social levels. Anarchist conceptions of power attempt to address hierarchical relationships across the entire spectrum of what constitutes the social. Thus, in addition to being categorically opposed to capitalism (a commonality between Marxism and anarchism), anarchists are also opposed to the state in all its forms (from neoliberal states to state-socialisms), the hegemony of cis-gendered heterosexuality and heteronormativity, patriarchy, white supremacy, et cetera.

Marx's later works have often been used to create a dialectical systems theory, as is evidenced by Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser's insistence in viewing Marx as a structuralist. This reading of Marx's actual works has been expounded upon in Leninist and Maoist thought, which show a greater drive to contextualize dialectical materialism as positivist-empiricism. The fact that much anarchist thought is skeptical about the veracity of the claims that this positivist approach reflects a totalizing systems theory purely based on economic determinism, underscores how anarchists are fundamentally concerned with how power manifests itself in a myriad of ways – not just according to class. To a certain extent, this concern is implicitly poststructuralist in that it reflects a critical hesitancy to reduce the flow of power to

a singular, albeit “complete,” system (for instance, one based on economic exploitation). It is at this juncture, that of power, that the similarities between anarchism and poststructuralism must be elucidated.

Michel Foucault, in an essay written in 1982, “The Subject and Power,” asserts that a “new economy of power relations” must be enacted, one that “consists in taking the forms of resistance against different forms of power as a starting point [...] it consists in using this resistance as a chemical catalyst so as to bring to light power relations, locate their position, find out their point of application and the methods used” (Foucault 128). Here Foucault outlines a poststructuralist approach to understanding power that is not prescriptive in its logic; thus like Adorno before him, Foucault’s project is one chiefly concerned with the negation of claims to authority rather than the creation of alternatives to this authority. Foucault goes on to argue that “rather than analyzing power from the point of view of its internal rationality, it consists of analyzing power relations through the antagonism of strategies” (Foucault 129). Dismissing logic which looks to a given power structure’s “internal rationality” is enacted by attempting to understand its inverted properties – its “antagonism of strategies.”

This logic necessitates that – in order to understand the ways in which power is integrated into the very discourse around a concept (as a model) such as “sanity” – what first must be understood is “what is happening in the field of insanity” (Foucault 129).

This poststructuralist approach to the dissemination of power mirrors the approaches of most contemporary anarchist thought to the same question. While more classical strains of anarchism, namely those which arose in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, do in fact take an orthodox structuralist approach to opposing power that is very similar to conventional Marxism – contemporary anarchism in the United States, and more specifically the trajectory of thought being articulated by CrimethInc. and other similar collectives, views the starting point of discussions on liberation within the context of oppression, which is an “antagonism of strategies.” For example, to understand what a post-patriarchal society may entail, CrimethInc. starts at what subjugation based on gender looks like now within the context of the present.

As previously stated, CrimethInc.’s understanding of power is inextricably linked to that of hierarchy. They define this concept as “a value system in which your worth [is] measured by the number of people and things you control, and how dutifully you obey those above you. Weight is exerted downward through the power structure: everyone is forced to accept and conform to this system by everyone else” (*Days of War* 31). What they establish in the explication of their use of the term “hierarchy” is a social relationship contextualized within authority. This relationship does not have to be confined to the basis of class and economic dynamics, as it is in traditional Marxist thought; instead it acts as an ontological constitution – one which can

be applied across different “genres” of exploitation. This diversity of oppression allows the anarchist critique to use different “entry points” into the dynamics of power and control, and it is precisely these “hierarchical values that are responsible for racism, classism, sexism, and a thousand other prejudices that are deeply ingrained in our society” (*Days of War* 33).

Within CrimethInc.’s conception of hierarchy is the notion that power has been appropriated from the individual both by implicit and explicit means. Explicit means of power expropriation are those that, to a certain extent, are overtly recognized as such. The classical notion of a master-slave relationship would be an example of this dynamic, in which power flows one way and the slave does not merely *relinquish* their power, but has it *forcefully stolen* from them. Implicit means of power expropriation are those that are not overtly recognized as power imbalances, and to a certain extent are usually imparted through socialization within a certain society’s mores and traditions (culture). Patriarchal belief systems, at least those within the United States, would be indicative of this kind of implicit expropriation. It is a construct of inequity which is socialized and often fostered through learning and internalizing from birth, whether the feelings are of superiority or inferiority. Thus, CrimethInc.’s radical project becomes that which attempts to reappropriate the subjugated power of the individual, while concurrently dismantling all systems of hierarchical control.

If hierarchy is defined as a contingent of control that is represented by a spectrum of power imbalances, then it necessarily follows that hierarchy is the establishment of authority within a given context. CrimethInc. follows traditional anarchist rhetoric in its definition and subsequent critique of authority; they claim, “We love power and hate authority” (*Rolling Thunder* 6). They assert that the reification of authority and the acquiescence to such control constitute a system of relations predicated on conflict. It is not the explicit forms of conflict that manifest sporadically which undergird this presupposition, rather it is the notion that conflict itself has become the norm within all social relations – and thus, such systems of socio-economic organization as capitalism become the management of such crisis. They claim that all attempts to manage the social sphere are merely “the manifestations of conflict as the system of human relations, every man for himself and force against us all” (*Expect Resistance* 65). Thus, for all their apparent inclinations to what is essentially a postmodern conception of the political, CrimethInc.’s conception of authority strangely creates a structural polemic, which necessitates the occupation of a negated prescriptive position – that of *antiauthoritarianism*.

According to a Foucauldian perspective, CrimethInc.’s critique of all systemic authority enters into the discursive ensnarement of occupying a theoretical position which, through attempting to define resistance to said authority, overlooks the way in



which power occupies this position as well. In contrast to CrimethInc.'s eagerness to occupy this position of opposition, Foucault argues that "it is not enough to say that these are anti-authority struggles; we must try to define more precisely what they have in common" (Foucault 129). Here Foucault attempts to analyze how, linguistically at least, "antiauthoritarian" functions as an empty signifier in that its very substance is predicated on a negated ontology. This is a negated ontology as it cannot occupy a *space of being* without its dependence on its inverse. *Antiauthoritarian*, as a polemical position, only has relevance when it is contextualized against *authority* – thus, antiauthoritarian possesses no being in and of itself. A Foucauldian approach to CrimethInc.'s use of the term, not as a nonessential signifier but rather as a position that moves beyond opposition into a prescriptive alterity, may find this problematic because CrimethInc. does not attempt to more fully define why there are indeed resonances between different forms of "antiauthoritarian" struggles. In attempting to elucidate his own conception of what constitutes antiauthoritarian struggles, Foucault systematizes a set of shared commonalities that he claims are present in all such resistance. In keeping with his analysis of power as being dependent on the "antagonism of strategies" (Foucault 129), he creates this classificatory schema to more fully understand the concepts of authority and power (primary signification) through the exploration of its "antagonism": antiauthority (secondary signification).

First within this schema, he claims that antiauthoritarian struggles are “‘transversal’ struggles, that is, they are not limited to one country. Of course they may develop more easily and to a greater extent in certain countries, but they are not confined to a particular political or economic form of government” (Foucault 129). Foucault uses the mathematical notion of the “transversal” here to explain the tendency of antiauthoritarianism to exist across geospatial and sociopolitical spectrums. Thus, despite the demonization of late-capitalist society by anarchist and Marxist rhetoric, Foucault raises the serious concern that power, and its reified form in authority, has the potential to exist outside of this sociopolitical construct – and therefore, unequal power relations could manifest in a post-capitalist society. Within his antiauthoritarian schematization, Foucault goes on to claim that:

“These are ‘immediate’ struggles for two reasons. In such struggles, people criticize instances of power that are the closest to them, those which exercise their action on individuals. They look not for the ‘chief enemy’ but for the immediate enemy. Nor do they expect to find a solution to their problem at a future date (that is, liberations, revolutions, end of class struggle). In comparison with a theoretical scale of explanations or a revolutionary order that polarizes the historian, they are anarchistic struggles” (Foucault 129).

This is a conception of the “antiauthoritarian” position typifying CrimethInc.’s extended critique of both Marxism and classical anarchism. There is an ardent immediacy within almost all of CrimethInc.’s work, which squarely situates such sites of struggle in the temporal present and against those forms of subjugation that are most “relevant” to a given individual.

This sentiment is echoed in CrimethInc.’s appropriation of a quote from Henry Miller’s 1949 novel, *Sexus: The Rosy Crucifixion I*: “The world only began to get something of value from me the moment I stopped being a serious member of society and became – myself” (*Days of War* 244). Tangentially related, in another instance of the detournement which is characteristic of CrimethInc., this Henry Miller quote is attributed to the correct author, but the wrong book – *Revolution of Everyday Life*. This second, more subtle appropriation, is important in the sense that it is both an acknowledgment of one of CrimethInc.’s many theoretical forebears, the Situationist Raoul Vaneigem and his most famous text *Revolution of Everyday Life*, as well as being a concise summation of CrimethInc.’s aspiration for *immediate* liberation. Vaneigem articulates this same preoccupation with immediacy in 1967, in the midst of the building foment leading to the student and worker uprising in France during May of 1968 when he asks: “Where is the field of battle? Always in the immediate extension of lived experience, in spontaneous action” (Vaneigem 96). Through a Foucauldian perspective,

this insistence that struggle be immediate (based on proximity to oppressive control and within the temporal present) is an explication through “antagonism,” in that what is meant by authority is being further defined through a more complete rendering of its antithesis.

Continuing with his schematization of antiauthoritarianism, Foucault goes on to assert that these “are struggles that question the status of the individual” (Foucault 129). Here a theoretical tension arises between Foucault’s and CrimethInc.’s respective treatments of the antiauthoritarian position: CrimethInc. is less concerned with *questioning* the “status of the individual” and more with *asserting* its importance. When CrimethInc. claims that “we live in a society that teaches there is not enough of any valuable resource to go around, including selfhood” (*Expect Resistance* 148), they are questioning the status of the individual in a sense which is aiming for its redemption from externalized forces of control. The poststructuralist Foucauldian concern with selfhood is contrary to the redemptive impulse, in so much as it questions whether such a concrete conception of self (one that can be defended from externalized oppression) actually exists in the first place. Foucault elaborates this point by claiming that “on the one hand, they [antiauthoritarian struggles] assert the right to be different and underline everything that makes individuals truly individual” (Foucault 129). This is essentially an antiauthoritarian “goal” which much of CrimethInc.’s rhetoric aspires to; the defiance

of control and the reclamation of an egoist sensibility.

In CrimethInc.'s book, *Anarchy in the Age of Dinosaurs*, this radical egoism is communalized: "If there is to be a revolution, it must encourage a personal transformation of the individual folks as well as the formation of revolutionary communities" (*Anarchy in Age* 137). Ostensibly, these "revolutionary communities" are to be made up of truly individuated persons – and thus CrimethInc. depicts an alternative to authoritarian systems in the free and voluntary association of liberated subjectivities. Yet according to Foucauldian thought, this logic represents an irreconcilable paradox; one in which the individual is at once hyper-subjectivized, yet a part of a communal whole. Foucault claims that this structural inconsistency is due to the fact that while concurrently championing the absolute merit of the individual, antiauthoritarian struggles "attack everything that separates the individual, breaks his links with others, splits up community life, forces the individual back on himself, and ties him to his own identity in a constraining way" (Foucault 129). This approach is indicative of the way in which CrimethInc. condemns the decay of authentic social relations, or the reduction of single issue causes into identity politics. Thus, the liberation of subjectivity which they are so vehemently in support of proves to be the very thing that possesses the most potential to distance oneself from the "revolutionary communities" they also espouse support for. Here the ever-present dilemma of the individualist or

collectivist dichotomy is represented; a contentious debate which has not been reconciled to any satisfactory extent since its inception during the Enlightenment.

Foucault's schema of ascribing meaning to antiauthoritarian struggle continues this antagonistic codification within the realm of knowledge and its relationship to power. He claims that antiauthoritarian struggles "are an opposition to the effects of power linked with knowledge, competence, and qualification – struggles against the privileges of knowledge. But they are also an opposition against secrecy, deformation, and mystifying representations imposed on people" (Foucault 130). Out of all of Foucault's essential components to his antiauthoritarian schema, the challenging of knowledge's relationship to power is perhaps what is most evident within CrimethInc.'s work.

CrimethInc. displays a critical hesitancy towards the notions surrounding expertise and specialization. They contend that expertise and specialization function on both the theoretical and practical levels, and unbalanced power flows within both. *Theoretical* specialization of knowledge is critiqued in the form of such "integral" components of civilization as philosophy and religion. CrimethInc. critiques the expertise in *practical* applications of knowledge such as science, food production, and medicine. They contend that knowledge becomes centralized and within the domain of a disproportionately small amount of specialists, as opposed to being held and distributed in a more

egalitarian fashion; this ultimately exemplifies how knowledge is inextricably linked to control. Their strongest critique within this context of specialized knowledge is that of the hegemonic position of “the scientific method” as the dominant epistemology aimed at defining the limits to what can indeed be understood.

CrimethInc. defines the scientific method as “a universal format and language for experimentation [...] the scientific method acts as a net combining the efforts of all the world’s scientists [...] to surpass our every need and bring us into their modernity ever faster and more efficiently” (*Days of War* 230). To CrimethInc. this is the zenith of knowledge as control, in that it becomes both the theoretical and practical model that literally moves societies forward within a defined linearity of progress. Yet this is problematic because the individuals comprising such a society do not often even have the most basic understanding of the knowledge which such progress is predicated upon for its own fortitude.

The fact that many contemporary “developed” societies are dependent on technologies that the majority of individuals only know how to *use*, but not *create*, poses an existential threat in the sense that experience is now predicated upon a profound disconnect from the world around the individual. CrimethInc. argues that this hegemony of science as the vanguard of objectivity, “with its universal explanations and solutions, taught us to distrust our own ingenuity, creativity, and intuition” (*Days of War* 230).

Thus, the need for specialization within knowledge entails the submission of individual experience and the deferral to expertise as the dominant means to interpret the unknown. CrimethInc. quotes a poem by Sera White entitled, "A Momentary Gain of My Loss; or, Fragments" as a means to explain the distance between the individual and the hegemony of science:

"Yes, the problem has been solved  
But I never saw it proved.  
Someone else has, but I have not,  
Landed on the moon" (*Days of War* 210).

Thus, for CrimethInc., the way in which knowledge is specialized, figuratively steals away the potentialities and possibilities to be explored by the individual because what is the "correct" way, answer, or explanation has already been defined and reinforced by societal institutions and social convention.

While CrimethInc. is interested in exploring how institutionalized knowledge and expertise effectively teach "us to distrust our own ingenuity, creativity, and intuition" (*Days of War* 231), Foucault's antiauthoritarianism is much more concerned with questioning "the way in which knowledge circulates and functions, its relations to power. In short the regime of knowledge" (Foucault 130). For CrimethInc., an understanding of the internal nuances of power circulation are only relevant if they subsequently lead to an attempt to materially challenge this control.

Finally in the establishment of his last criteria to



conversely understand authority, through the schematization of its antagonistic *other*, Foucault questions the nature of an antiauthoritarian ontology. He claims that "all these present struggles revolve around the question: Who are we? They are a refusal of these abstractions, of economic and ideological state violence, which ignore who we are individually, and also a refusal of a scientific or administrative inquisition that determines who one is" (Foucault 130). Here Foucault underscores an important point within his conception of antiauthoritarian struggle, in that he equates the theoretical inability to grasp a totalizing conception of "self" as the means through which violence is both predicated and inscribed on whatever abstractions constitute the approximations of a "self." Thus, attempting to authoritatively locate and define the self forms the basis of all antiauthoritarian struggles, since it is precisely this fragmentation upon which externalized control inscribes itself on the being of the individual. This becomes a simultaneous impulse of resistance, one that attempts to locate the self while also attempting to dismantle the institutions of external coercion which impede this process of self-authorship.

Foucault's notion that for antiauthoritarianism, state violence is indicative of a social system that fundamentally denies the subjective self-construction of the individual, proves to be one of CrimethInc.'s central concerns as well. CrimethInc.'s conception of violence is that it more often than not functions implicitly, in the subtleties of all social relations

within the late-capitalist state. Yet this violence is not entirely linked solely to economic coercion, but rather (to use Foucault's term), it is a violence that is *transversal* – extending across various sites of social contestation. It is a violence that aims at widening distance, both from oneself and authentic communities.

CrimethInc. elaborates upon this coercive distancing by describing the “hush in the air, the absence of friends rejoicing together, of the shouts of children at play, for the children are all at home with video games and television and no one wants to be here, everyone wishes they were somewhere far, far away, farther even than the palm-tree-spotted scenes on the billboards advertising vacation resorts and malt liquor...*violence, violence*” (*Expect Resistance* 65). This is essentially the ascendancy of an ontology of implicit violence, one in which ennui no longer exists as aberration, but as the norm – a culture of malaise. CrimethInc. asserts that “you may not see one altercation, one bruise; but the feeling in the air is the feeling of war” (*Expect Resistance* 65). This omnipresence of control, the fact that it exists regardless of a substantive expression, points to Foucault's claim that a poststructuralist approach to power necessitates an inquiry into the way power *flows*, rather than the way it *manifests materially*. Thus, the “main objective of these [antiauthoritarian] struggles is to attack not so much such-or-such institution of power, or group, or elite, or class but, rather, a technique, a form of power” (Foucault 130). This critique moves

power from the realm of explicit control, into a systematizing logic; one which no longer depends on material circumstances but rather on the undergirding relationships that support this logic of sublimated control.

Foucault contends, which is ostensibly what almost all anarchists believe as well, that the rise of this immaterial critique of power as a relation is due to the rise of the contemporary state as the *de facto* form of social governance. He claims that the modern state relies on a conception of control that is “both an individualizing and a totalizing form of power. [...Which is] a tricky combination in the same political structures of individualization techniques and of totalization procedures” (Foucault 131). It is this inherency of control, which at once allows the individual a means to existence while defining the limits to such being, which most fully comprises Foucault’s notion of power.

CrimethInc.’s antiauthoritarianism is therefore concerned with this Foucauldian notion of power, one that “applies itself to immediate everyday life [and] categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him that he must recognize and others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power that makes individuals subjects” (Foucault 130). It is a rejection of absolutist identity, static in the sense that this constructed identity becomes the entirety of that individual’s essence. This power allows the individual to maintain the pretense that they are the authors of their own conditional iden-

tity, when in fact the reduction to such imperative identity acts as a means to function both at the “individualizing” and “totalizing” levels of power relations. Making individuals into subjects forms the basis of the contemporary state’s loci of control, namely that it makes the individual “subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge [...] suggest[ing] a form of power that subjugates and makes subject to” (Foucault 130).

This is precisely how CrimethInc. frames their radical project; it is one placing itself in opposition to both the subjugation of subjectivity, and the reduction of the individual to a single, fixed identity. Thus, while they are obviously against material oppression in all of its manifestations (classism, sexism, etc.), they are more concerned with power as a *medium* rather than a *result*. CrimethInc. claims that their “true ‘enemy’ are the social forces and patterns at work between us, and it is these forces which we must come to understand and to struggle against” (*Days of War* 82). This is perhaps the most explicit articulation by CrimethInc. of Foucault’s conception of the antiauthoritarian position.

For CrimethInc. the question of power is central to their understanding of both the reasoning for what they consider to be globalized inequality, and their prescription for liberated acts of resistance against this totalizing system. Of the many mediums that power flows through, exerting its hegemony, culture becomes the most predominant. Through an in-

dividual's socialization and total immersion within a specific world view, hegemonic control no longer becomes something external to the self, but rather, the individual fully synthesizes and internalizes this control into their very being – their individual identity. Through a critical approach challenging the benign representation of culture as apolitical, CrimethInc.'s polemic attempts to address how the logic of power and subjugation has become so fully ingrained within both the individual and the culture the individual belongs to – which ostensibly is the politics of *antiauthoritarianism*.

## CrimethInc. on Work

CrimethInc. takes a decidedly different approach in *Work* from their earlier works, in that they attempt to elucidate a theoretical analysis aimed at creating a narrative-like context for the causal determinants of the late-capitalist epoch. They move away from the praxis-oriented, potential-driven immediacy of the moment, and the joy and approximations of self-freedom that one may find so central to texts like *Days of War, Nights of Love*, to a more evaluative, conservative, historically-reflective approach to understanding the contemporary sociopolitical context. It is a shift seemingly reflective of how radical political maturation or evolution often seems to happen within American anarchist milieus. By displacing their earlier endearing, wild and reckless abandon in favor of a dry, simplified regurgitation of economic analysis which almost any radical, anarchist or otherwise, would most likely

agree with and dismiss as blatantly evident, CrimethInc. effectively loses the youthful vigor (and perhaps even naiveté) which found resonance with many young anarchists in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The mythology of CrimethInc. was built around the notion of a certain lifestyle constructed as being somehow external, or at least in opposition, to the crushing weight of late-capitalist social expectations, norms, and mores.

In place of this alter-mythology, in *Work* CrimethInc. chooses to enter into the discourse of most radical political analyses which are primarily concerned with the evaluation of social relations under capitalism. This is not to argue that such an analysis is not a worthwhile undertaking, but rather that because of CrimethInc.'s simplistic reduction of the rhizomatic nature of late-capitalist social relations (when much more adept and adroit analyses have already been articulated within the communist and anarchist "milieus" since their own respective inceptions) this foray into evaluative economics comes off as didactic polemics. Such didactic propaganda ensures CrimethInc.'s position as an anarchist "gateway" project intent on the radicalization of the uninitiated. While such a vulgar approach to building political affinities can be critiqued in its own right, what is important here is that *Work* is not reminiscent of the grand and often hyperbolic prose that *inspired* rather than *rationalized* the desertion of capitalist-relations that typified early CrimethInc. Their claim that, "The idea that you need

a complete understanding of the economy to come to any conclusions about it just serves to silence people" (*Work* 41) proves to be utmost irony, since after the proclamation of such a generous qualifier, they proceed to embark on a lengthy, if simplistic, multi-faceted analysis of capitalist economies of control.

CrimethInc. tinges their positive economics (the descriptive "what is" to their analysis) with elements of a more normative approach ("what ought to be"), and at times they reservedly assert their implied position that "what ought to be" is entirely extrinsic to economics. At the core of their positivist economic analysis is the notion of positionality. Instead of traditional production/consumption market analysis CrimethInc. chooses to make their approach reader-relevant by viewing sites within capitalism as positions ostensibly held by actual individuals. This immediacy of recognition, allowing the reader to effectively situate themselves within CrimethInc.'s own economic schema is indeed similar to how the seemingly libratory narratives of their earlier works created a cathartic resonance with the reader. Yet it is precisely this situating within subject-roles (in *Work* they are magnates, politicians, bosses, superstars, professionals, middle-management, the self-employed, teachers, students, service workers, domestic laborers, sex workers, military, police, private security, migrant laborers, prisoners, the unemployed, and homeless) which locates exploitation, subjugation, and oppression solely on the basis of the *position* one



occupies, when in fact it is the *relations* that one is affectively tied to which constitutes such domination.

Critiquing the mythology of work, CrimethInc. acknowledges that capitalism is sustained because of our own implications within it. They claim that

“capitalism exists because we invest everything in it: all our energy and ingenuity in the marketplace, all our resources at the supermarket and in the stock market, all our attention in the media. To be more precise, capitalism exists because our daily activities are it” (*Work* 30).

This mirrors notions of the bioeconomy in the sense that existence itself is codified by its relational ties to the production and proliferation of capitalism. However what is odd about this analysis is that the individual, as a subject (the worker in this case), is somehow positioned outside of this complicity with capitalism. Thus, while the individual worker is implicated within the prolongation of capitalism through their material and productive work, CrimethInc. says nothing as to how capitalist social relations also influence, or even create, the psychosocial components of subjectivization. For CrimethInc. the individual worker possesses radical subversive agency in their ability to cease material production. Yet, this analysis refuses to engage with how late-capitalistic social relations are those that precisely isolate the individual by making them subjects.

CrimethInc.’s argument has no qualms with the process of subjectivization and they instead claim that

it is quite simple to acknowledge what an individual's "best interest" or "desires", independent of capitalist socialization, actually are. They claim that as we obey "[...] teachers, bosses, the demands of the market – not to mention laws, parents' expectations, religious scriptures, social norms – we're conditioned from infancy to put our desires on hold" (*Work* 31).

What is blatantly wrong about this presupposition is that if one wishes to acknowledge that workers as individuals are implicated within capitalism's continuation through deferrals to authority taught as a means of socialization within the hegemony of capitalist ideology, one must hold the subject-position of the "individual" to necessarily be suspect. It is not that "we're conditioned from infancy to put our desires on hold" (*Work* 31), but *that we're conditioned from infancy to adopt certain desires*.

It is here that one can make the argument that our "desires" are not entirely our own, and so ceasing to materially reproduce the machinations of capital is not enough – as it is also a war against the process of subjectivization which occurs precisely at the "individual" level. Thus, when CrimethInc. asks and answers: "What should we be producing, if not all this stuff? Well, how about *happiness itself*" (*Work* 25), one cannot help but be skeptical as to accept that the production of "happiness" is comprehensible without situating it within capitalist relations. Our conception of happiness, freedom, and justice do not exist external to capitalist social

relations, and instead are completely mediated and reified by socialization and subjectivization. If this logic is beginning to sound fatalistic or tinged with nihilism, it is because if one acknowledges that late-capitalism is at a stage of development in which its sustenance depends on our own implication and further integration within it, as opposed to our own exploitation by some nefarious "ruling class," then one must doubt our own authenticity as "individuals" and instead explore how these social relations (some of which we willingly choose to engage with) have, in effect, created "us" as subjects. Thus, as fatalistic as it may seem, when CrimethInc. invites us to "imagine a world in which everything people did, they did because they *wanted* to, because they were personally invested in bringing it about" (*Work* 33), they fail to understand that as affectively-defined subjects even what we "want" to do is defined in relation to capitalism.

In the final section of *Work*, entitled "Resistance," the eternally optimistic CrimethInc. claim that although it is "hard to believe now that capitalism has colonized nearly every aspect of our lives [...] there are still countless examples of other ways to do things" (*Work* 331). This argumentative line, which posits that there are in fact spaces/sites outside of the psychosocial influence of late-capitalist relations, is at once indicative of CrimethInc.'s naiveté yet also evocative of their main claim to popularity within the American anarchist milieu. It is through these prescriptive narratives that CrimethInc. first garnered a large anticapitalist fol-

lowing, yet it is exactly this sort of romantic mythologizing which they move away from in *Work*. During CrimethInc.'s rise to subcultural popularity, they eschewed narratives involving rigidly academic analysis of the late-capitalist context in favor of romanticized accounts of how individuals and/or groups of individuals could live in direct opposition to late-capitalist social mores.

The shift that occurs with the publication of *Work*, is that in the collective's own theoretical trajectory, analysis has for the most part always played a secondary role to the prescriptive narratives of living in the immediacy of the moment that comes about through "breaking the spell" – whereas in *Work* a much more austere sensibility emerges, one which attempts to articulate a simplified analysis of the structural and institutionalized underpinnings of how capitalism functions. It is telling that the book is divided into sections according to their reinterpreted image of the capitalist pyramid, which explicitly takes as its inspiration the famous 1911 "Pyramid of Capitalist System" illustration from the *Industrial Worker*. The fact that their analysis uses such structural demarcation as its rhetorical foundation is testament to the notion that their understanding of late-capitalism is a construct comprised of such clearly delineated "institutionalized" levels of exploitation – and such antiquated conceptions ignore the complexity and nuance of contemporary power relations.

Perhaps more cautious after earlier lifestyle critiques of their prescriptive program, *Work*-era

CrimethInc. seems much more comfortable in their analysis of capitalism rather than being explicit in *how one should* attempt to live in direct opposition to capitalism. That said, there does indeed seem to be a more concerted influence of contemporary continental political philosophy in much of their later-work as CrimethInc. flirts with certain notions of revolutionary ontologies of becoming in declarative proclamations such as:

“Dismantling capitalism doesn’t just mean holding material goods in common, but rediscovering each other and ourselves – embracing a totally different way of being in the world” (*Work* 332).

Yet even amongst the glimmers of non-programmatic notions of collective subjectivities arising through the very processes of their own becoming, CrimethInc. often resorts back to their need to make resistance explicit and defined – and this often comes about through unwarranted optimism (given the inherently totalizing nature of their analysis of capitalism’s control) based on grandiose conjectures. Such conjectures often contradict the very nature of the description of the sociopolitical circumstance which anticapitalist resistance finds itself situated in. For example, CrimethInc. claims that while “capitalism is headed for catastrophe” and that the ensuing compromises made as a result of earlier crises “served to perpetuate capitalism” capitalists have nonetheless “abandoned their former means of co-optation and self-perpetua-

tion” and now “the future is up for grabs” (*Work* 335).

CrimethInc. goes on to concede that “capitalism has been on the brink of crisis for decades now” (*Work* 336), yet they do not extend this argument to the logical conclusion that *late-capitalism is the management of crisis itself*. Here CrimethInc., in the midst of their acknowledging that capitalism is extremely adept at recuperating crisis and even anticapitalist resistance into new modes of market exchange and coercion, still cannot temper their eternal optimism even with the harrowing conclusions that they seem to allude to. Instead of exploring further the ways in which late-capitalism at once perpetuates and maintains crisis, CrimethInc. offers the inspiring yet shallow prospect that one can envisage true anticapitalist alterities within the psychosocial terrain of late-capitalism itself. This conclusion – as an exit to the affective mess of late-capitalist relations and how individual subjectivity is at once constructed and complicit with the power dynamics of domination – may be seductive, but it is naive and lacking in many respects. Their program of resistance is prescriptive and at worst prefigurative politics, as they coyly ask their readership to “think ahead to the upheavals on the horizon: when they arrive, what will you wish you had done to prepare?” (*Work* 337). At once conservative and bombastic, they go on to claim that:

“We don’t offer the only road out of capitalism, but we believe ours is the most inviting one [...] Make no mistake, the world is

going to change. It's up to us whether it will change for better or worse" (*Work* 337). Implicit in this claim are glimmers of a revolutionary subjectivity with a truly transformative agency, which ultimately cannot exist as external to capitalist codification.

This proves to be quite a contradictory position to adopt in that even through their critiques of orthodox Marxism, CrimethInc. reasserts elements of a dichotomized conception of coercion/oppression that it claims orthodox Marxism has been guilty of. Thus, in a circuitous way, they implicitly point to a revolutionary subject – or at least a collective subject which possesses predisposed revolutionary agency. In opposition to this, the argument must be put forward that any semblance of transformative agency cannot exist a priori to the transformative event itself, and any new revolutionary-becoming can only come about explicitly as a result of the process which wills itself into being. In such claims as:

"Even in the midst of catastrophe, there's no guarantee capitalism will fall on its own. For over a century and a half, Marxists have promised that capitalism would collapse once the 'material conditions' ripened sufficiently; but every crisis has left capitalism stabler than ever. Next time it's in danger of breaking down, we have to seize the opportunity to interpose a different way of life" (*Work* 341).

It becomes clear that the revolutionary subject vaguely alluded to here by CrimethInc. can willfully extract

themselves from the machinations of late-capitalist totality. On the contrary, the diffuse power relations of the late-capitalist rhizomatic schema function so that the individual is entirely circumscribed and implicated within capitalism's functioning – there is no ontological outside.

What is perplexing throughout much of *Work* is not necessarily their analysis of the contemporary sociopolitical moment, but rather the conclusions that CrimethInc. arrives at *through* such analysis. Along these lines, and rightfully so, CrimethInc. still espouses their particularly critical view of identity politics. They describe this anti-essentialist view by arguing that

“in the US, it seems that production and consumption no longer create massive social bodies likely to conceive of their interests outside of capitalism. On the contrary, both have been structured so as not to constitute coherent social bodies at all. This is not necessarily for the worst: if we want to abolish capitalism, it might be better not to conceptualize ourselves according to our roles within it. But how else can people come together to resist?” (*Work* 344).

Such clarity of insight is hopeful, yet it quickly devolves into passive strategies of resistance through rehashed forms of non-capitalist communication – using the events of the Arab Spring in 2011 as examples of how new forms of potentially revolutionary communication can be ushered into being. While this serves as a



tenuous and highly contentious example of how new forms of anticapitalist resistance can take root, it actually elucidates CrimethInc.'s infatuation with the notion of spreading narratives of revolt. The spreading of "narratives that legitimize revolt" (*Work* 353) may not be suspect (given that most anticapitalist projects are essentially all counter-narrative projects), what complicates it for CrimethInc. is that it can be read as a direct contradiction of their own edicts to eschew the ways that capitalism forces us to "conceptualize ourselves according to our roles within it" (*Work* 344). The impulse to create narratives of alterity seems to be the fullest extension of conceptualizing ourselves according to our roles or identities within capitalist social relations.

*Work* represents a marked shift in the political trajectory of CrimethInc. as it embodies a move away from their earlier writing that constructs political positions which are not necessarily dependent on a totalizing understanding of how capitalism functions, and are instead focused on the potential for counter-narratives to exist within a coercive social dynamic. With *Work*, they almost retroactively set out to construct a relatively complete socioeconomic analysis that the life-affirming prescriptions of their earlier works admirably refused to engage with. It is indicative of a tempered reflection upon their theoretical evolution, yet it ignores the recognition that it is precisely this earlier quasi-*ahistorical* approach, which refused to base their argument for the immediacy of individual

and collective freedom on a calculated understanding of the material forces rendering this freedom almost nonexistent. Continuing to problematize this much more conservative move, away from their earlier active positions of immediate freedom, is a strange choice: to consciously regress into a descriptive theory which is a reductive and simplified conception of what are essentially economically-based antagonisms. Such preoccupations with structural conceptions of sociopolitical reality are ultimately not that much more than a cursory nod to conventional Marxist economic understandings of capitalist class-relations. In making this theoretical move, CrimethInc. loses touch with its earlier appeal, namely their initial arguments to create new conceptions of collective existence entirely within the domination of capitalism, yet operating according to entirely different counter-narratives and subcultural social schema, and the whole host of mores, attitudes, and beliefs that accompany such a radical departure.

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